

Cry me a river – elegy for a wounded planet



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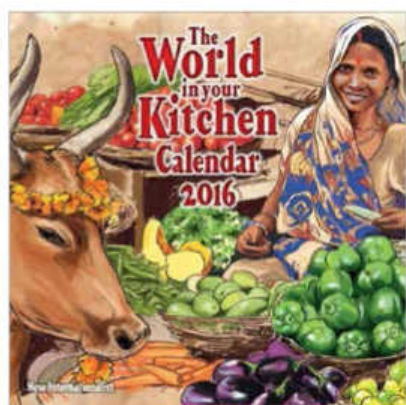
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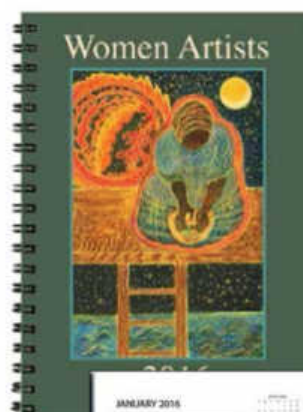
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The New Internationalist (NI) magazine was founded by Peter and Lesley Adamson in 1970. Together with a range of other publications it is published by New Internationalist Publications Ltd which is wholly owned by the New Internationalist Trust and co-operatively managed:
Accounts: Frank Syrratt.
Advertising: Michael York.
Administration: Anna Weston.
Design: Andrew Kokotka, Ian Nixon, Juha Sorsa.
Editorial (Magazine): Vanessa Baird, Dinyar Godrej, Jo Lateu, Hazel Healy, Chris Spannos, Jamie Kelsey-Fry.
Editorial (Publications): Chris Brazier.
Mail Order: Bev Dawes, Emma Dunkley, James Rowland.
Marketing (Magazine): Amanda Synnott, Rob Norman.
North American Publisher: Ian McKelvie.
Marketing (Publications): Dan Raymond-Barker, Kelsi Farrington.
Production: Fran Harvey.
Web and IT: Charlie Harvey, Pete Stewart.
North America Publisher: Ian McKelvie.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

To update your subscription with address changes etc or to contact us with any other subscription queries:
Website: www.newint.org/subscriptions
You will need your subscriber reference number which is on the magazine address label.
Email: newint@cdsglobal.ca
Phone: 1-800-661-8700
Fax: 905-946-0410
Canada PO Box 819, Markham, ON L3P 8A2
US Box 1062, Niagara Falls, NY 14304-1062

SUBSCRIPTION PRICES

Canada: 1 year \$44 (plus GST or HST) Foreign (by air) 1 year \$70
GST 121784854 US: 1 year \$44 Foreign (by air) 1 year \$70

Subscribers in the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Japan should contact their local subscriptions office whose addresses can be found at: www.newint.org/about/contact/

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2446 Bank Street, Suite 653
Ottawa, ON K1V 1A8 Tel: 613-826-1319 Email: nican@newint.org

Advertising: Michael York Email: michael@emsm.org.uk

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NEWSSTAND DISTRIBUTOR: Natalie Dalton, Disticor Direct,
ndalton@disticor.com
Publications Mail Agreement number 40063336. Return
undeliverable Canadian addresses to Circulation Department, NI
Magazine, PO Box 819, Markham, ON L3P 8A2.

US periodicals postage paid at Niagara Falls, NY (USPS 329-770). US
office of publication: 2421 Hyde Park Blvd, Niagara Fall, NY 14305.

US postmaster: send address changes to NI Magazine, PO Box 1062,
Niagara Falls, NY 14304.

Indexing: Indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index Quarterly (CPIQ),
Canadian Business and Current Affairs and the Alternative Press Index.
Available in full-text electronic format from EBSCO and Proquest.

The New Internationalist is published monthly except that the Jan/Feb
and July/Aug issues are combined.



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© New Internationalist Publications Ltd. 2015
ISSN 0305-9529

ISO accreditation 9001-2008



Wrong prescription



Does repeating a thing make it true?

The followers of mainstream economic dogma must surely think 'Yes'. After the financial crash of 2008 and the malaise ever since, they haven't changed their tune much. Their prescriptions don't work but the patients – you or me – are still being dosed with 'freemarket' medicine.

It's enough to make one go a funny shade of green.

We've worked on this edition in the spirit of providing something of an antidote. The economic bottom line is inevitable, say the powers that be. Just the way things are. Well, we – and an ever-growing legion of dissenting economists and fed-up-to-the-back-teeth members of the general public – say, 'No'. These cherished myths are causing real harm and we need to ditch them.

A big thank you to my co-writer and fellow myth-buster on *The Big Story* this month – former **New Internationalist** co-editor David Ransom, who has brought his wit, insight and engagement to bear on it.

Among other features this month is an unusual piece by Suprabha Seshan, who is director of a botanical sanctuary in South India. It's the kind of ecological writing that has a heartbeat. Meanwhile, regular columnist Steve Parry's ears are ringing after being subjected to much Twittering. ■

Dinyar Godrej

DINYAR GODREJ

for the New Internationalist Co-operative
newint.org

This month's contributors include:



Karel Prinsloo is a Namibian award-winning photographer who has been working for over 20 years. He has covered, for the most part, conflicts and wars in Africa and the Middle East.



Jackie Morris is an author and illustrator. She lives in Wales, where she paints, using watercolours. Her latest book, *The Wild Swans*, is published by Frances Lincoln. She has two children.



Suprabha Seshan is an environmental educator. She lives in a plant sanctuary in Kerala, India, and occasionally writes. Her main passion is to support human and non-human cultures based on nature.

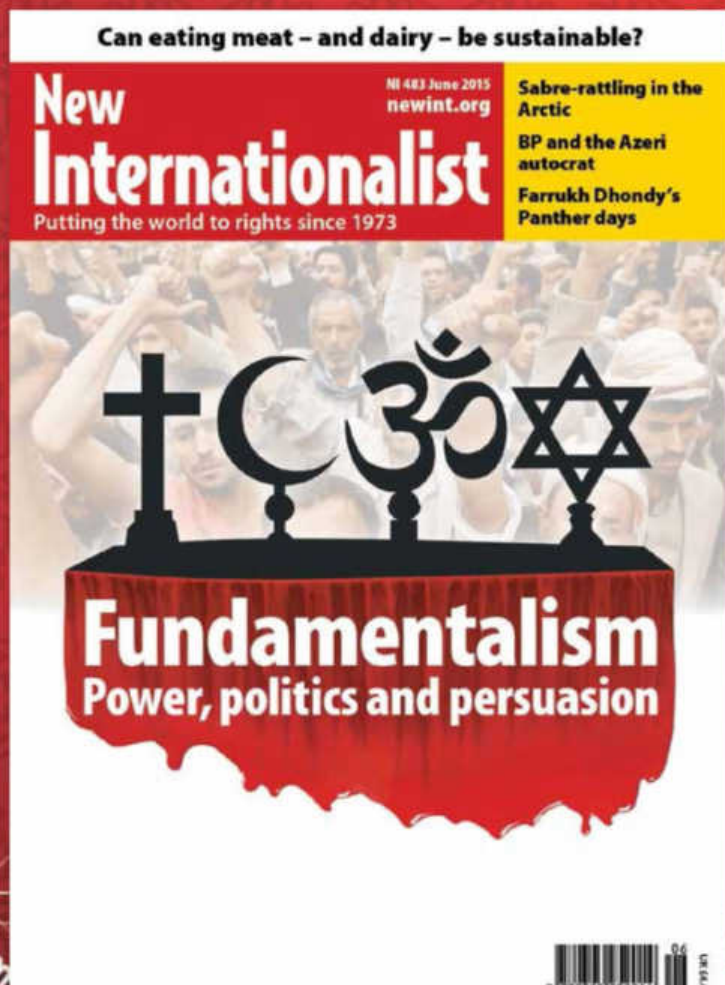


Belle Mellor is a prize-winning freelance illustrator and animator. She specializes in the editorial field, relishing the speedy deadlines, idea generation, and relationship between text and image. bellemellor.com

Coming next month:

The refugee crisis – what is to be done?

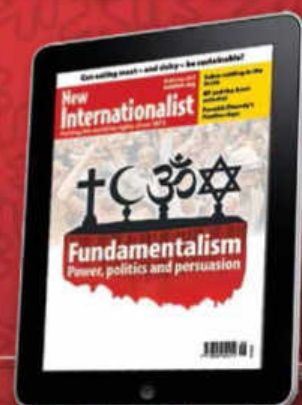
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Agenda

Stories making the news this month

- 8 Colombia: is the FARC peace deal something to celebrate?
- 8 UN peacekeepers in disgrace
- 9 Mapuche refuse fracking in Argentina
- 9 Introducing Justin Trudeau
- 9 Saudi rights defenders, really?
- 10 Holding the line against ISIS in Iraq
- 10 In search of lost Indian soldiers
- 11 Good reasons to run from the Gambia
- 11 Wolves and boars galore in Chernobyl
- PLUS: *Scratchy Lines* by cartoonist **Simon Kneebone** and **Reasons to be Cheerful**.



Belle Mellor

The Big Story – 10 Economic Myths

- 13 **Austerity** – will it eventually bring about prosperity?
- 15 **Deficit reduction** – the only way out of a slump?
- 16 **Taxing the rich** – does it scare off investors?
- 18 **Economic migrants** – are they a burden?
- 20 VISUAL **'I predict...'** When economists got it all wrong.
- 21 **The private sector** – more efficient than the private sector?
- 23 **Fossil fuels** – are they really cheaper than renewables?
- 24 **Financial regulation** – will it spell doom for banking?
- 26 **Organized labour** – is it regressive?
- 27 **Debt** – must it always be repaid?
- 28 **Growth** – the be all and end all?

Features

32 Cry me a river

A poetic and heartfelt plea to restore a wounded planet.

By **Suprabha Seshan**.

PLUS: *Open Window* with guest cartoonist **Agim Sulaj**.



Mixed media

38 Film reviews

Carol, directed by Todd Haynes; **The Lesson**, directed by Kristina Grozeva and Petar Valchanov.

39 Music reviews

From Sacred to Secular by Various artists; **Impredicible** by Bareto.

40 Book reviews

Nocilla Dream by Agustín Fernández Mallo; **A Brief Stop on the Road from Auschwitz** by Göran Rosenberg; **Smart Citizens, Smarter State** by Beth Simone Noveck.
PLUS **Also out there...** including books on ISIS

Opinion

37 Mark Engler

#ShellNo: the triumph of the Kayaktivists

43 Steve Parry

In the eye of a Twitter storm.
PLUS: **Poly**'s *Big Bad World* cartoon.



Andy Clark/Backbone Campaign under a CC licence

Regulars

6 Letters

Women-only spaces; White Helmets; and suburban squeeze.

7 Letter from Bangui

Ruby Diamonde dines with a man on a mission to wake up his people.

30 Country Profile: North Korea

42 Southern Exposure

Karel Prinsloo photographs a patient vendor in Kenya's Kibera slum.

44 Worldbeaters

Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto may look like butter wouldn't melt... but looks can be deceiving.

45 Puzzle Page

PLUS: **Marc Roberts'** *Only Planet* cartoon.

46 And Finally

The system is rigged, but it can be changed, US-Iranian film director **Ramin Bahrani** tells **Malcolm Lewis**.

Front cover: Juha Sorsa

Magazine designed by Andrew Kokotka and Juha Sorsa.

All monetary values are expressed in US dollars unless otherwise noted.

Praise, blame and all points in between? Give us your feedback.

The **New Internationalist** welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They might be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Letters should be sent to letters@newint.org or to your local **NI** office. Please remember to include a town and country for your address.



Different dynamic

You say 'essentialist radical feminists' wish to exclude trans women from women's spaces (**NI 486**).

They are not 'essentialist radical', they are just feminists. And they don't wish to exclude trans women because of prejudice. It's because not all, but most, 'women-only' spaces were created, (over many years of hard work) as a first step to solving some problems of *people who were brought up as girls*. Of course, trans women, and men, have problems as well, but they are different problems. It may be like a gambling addict going to Alcoholics Anonymous; it would be interesting to discuss where their experiences were the same and where they differed, but it would change the dynamic.

Henrietta Cubitt Cambridge, England

Social construct

Re: '*Ma vie en jeune*', **NI 486**. It seems (to me, a cis-gender female) as though gender is as much a social construct as sexuality and that it's much more of a spectrum than an 'either this or that' scenario.

Louise Sheridan via Facebook

White Helmets

Re: 'Rushing towards death', **NI 485**.

I had not heard of the White Helmets before reading this article. I am so moved and in awe of what they are doing. There is still a lot most people don't know about what is happening in Syria. I have thought for some time that the world has gone very quiet about Bashar al-Assad since ISIS took centre stage and how that must suit him. It is interesting to read Raed Saleh's view (that first we need to get rid of Assad, the first terrorist, and then the Syrians will be able to deal with ISIS) at a time when Western powers are considering working with Assad to get rid of ISIS as a first priority.

Maggie via our website



Unnatural selection?

Re: 'What do Syrians want?', **NI 485**.

Another carefully selected survey that betrays the bigger picture on behalf of those that pursue regime change in their own interests. The vast majority of displaced Syrians are in government-held areas. This would not be if they were, as claimed

by 'activists', being killed by their own government. Syrians overwhelmingly elected their government, they are the ones with the right to choose. Demonizing the head of state in order to attack the whole state is a failed tactic that directly leads to the chaos we have now – see Iraq and Libya. Degrading legitimate state security forces has provided the vacuum for extremism to flourish, which threatens us all and increases the refugee crisis. The answer has to be to stop interfering. Stop training and arming Syria's assassins and stop the sanctions: this will allow Syrians to restore the peace and rebuild their nation.

Simon Wolfers via our website

Singled out

Re: 'A resilient revolution', **NI 485**

Not just this article in particular, which was excellent, but the whole issue! Using it to challenge a whole lot of my Facebook friends into stunned silence. So well-timed. If I had to pick an issue that made my long-time subscription worthwhile, it would be this one.

Grace Gorman via our website

Rural opposition

Your 'basic principles' of an alternative society ('What should we stand for?', **NI 484**) included a bullet point of 'reducing... suburban sprawl, and encouraging a more equal distribution of population between rural and urban areas'.

Presumably by lowering urban densities and raising



rural ones? A bit like suburbs, then.

Each year, an extra 100,000 or so British residents move down into southeast England, which is also the destination of most immigrants and refugees who come to the UK. There is an acute housing crisis there, particularly for the poorest in society. So leaving aside some prior questions like cost, ownership, and the personal wishes of the families who would occupy them, what would be the practical realization of your 'basic principle' for England?

For all its faults and frailties, our current planning system tries to deliver answers to this conundrum, and (just for instance) in the last 10 years all three mainstream parties have actively promoted in government the establishment of new towns and communities to meet the needs. Sadly it's usually the people in the low-density rural areas who most strongly oppose these plans, and in doing so they freely quote the arguments about sustainability and 'de-growth' you advanced so eloquently.

Andrew Stunell Stockport, England

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the **New Internationalist**.

The revolutionary

RUBY DIAMONDE meets up with a man who is restless for change.

A friend sends me a message

online, wanting a chat. 'Sorry,' I text her back, 'but am just on my way out for dinner.'

'Ah, what do you have for dinner in Bangui?' she wants to know.

'Chicken and fish or fish and chicken!' I type, reaching for my car keys.

The Central African Republic is not known for its cuisine; local food is based on *gozo*, boiled cassava root, which is filling, bland and starchy, but has no nutritional value at all. Usually, it's served with sauces and often accompanied by fish or chicken – hence my quip. But these days in Bangui there are more choices, like pizza, pasta, Indian and Chinese food – if you can afford them. The city-centre restaurants mainly catering for ex-pats are too pricey for most Central Africans.

This evening I am meeting one of my favourite Central African friends in one of my favourite Bangui haunts. L'escal is a dimly lit riverside restaurant with dodgy décor and stained tablecloths. But the beer is cold, the food tasty and inexpensive, and they serve my all-time favourite local dish, *maboke*: fish steamed with coriander, tomatoes and onions and wrapped in banana leaves.

My dinner date, Quentin, likes maboke too. He's late, as always, and turns up with his mobile phone clamped to his ear, as always, talking to someone in the Central African vernacular, Sango. 'Barao!' he greets me in Sango, kissing me on each cheek. Then, 'Ça va?'

Quentin does many different things at the same time: he's a storyteller, a musician, an advocacy trainer and an entrepreneur. He runs his own national NGO promoting inter-communal dialogue through the arts, acts as spokesperson for Central African civil society organizations, and is a member of the National



Transitional Council, the Central African Parliament. He's well connected, proud, nationalistic and restless.

We order our maboke and drinks, then sit back and smile at each other. We've been out of touch for more than a week, a long time for us.

'We Central Africans are losing our way!' he exclaims, shaking his head. 'The government is irresponsible, people are disappointed, and there's no-one to protect their rights. We need a revolution!'

'What kind of revolution?' I raise my eyebrows. I'm used to this.

'We need to decide our own future and negotiate on our own terms. Internationals need to treat us as equals and respect the wishes of civil society and the people on the streets. Central Africans are ready to come onto the streets and protest until something changes for real!' His eyes gleam with passion.

One of the objects of his ire is the UN mission here. MINUSCA (the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic) arrived here in September 2014, and has struggled to control violence and protect civilians. The first head of the mission was fired for concealing his knowledge of a Bangui child sexual abuse scandal

implicating French troops. Quentin echoes many Central Africans when he says MINUSCA need to 'apply their mandate or leave our country.' Not many have the courage to say this so publicly.

Quentin has set up a nonviolent civil society platform to challenge the Transitional Government, the UN and the French, who all enjoy mass influence in CAR at the expense, he says, of the Central African people. Not everyone agrees with his stance: some civil-society activists do not support him, the government does not like what he's doing, and neither do local thugs who've threatened him; all of which only drives him on.

Quentin's outspokenness and charisma are, I think, both his strength and his weakness. He can alienate people when he rants, but I just rant back at him, then we both listen to each other.

As one of Central Africa's best-known performers and well-established political figures, Quentin is among the elites of this country. He could afford to have a swanky house in one of the better Bangui neighbourhoods and eat in the ex-pat restaurants, but he stays in the midst of a local community, with its bad roads, daily power cuts and rising street crime. Likewise, he could leave CAR, and make a good life for himself in another Francophone country, but he chooses to stay here in Bangui. Because, he says, 'I want to wake up my people so they start deciding their own future.'

I'm suddenly distracted by the scent of maboke spices. I glance towards the kitchen, then back at Quentin. I don't agree with everything he says and does, but I really respect his refusal of fatalism, and his hunger for change. ■

Ruby Diamonde is a pseudonym.

COLOMBIA

Is the FARC peace deal something to celebrate?

It was one of those handshakes that will go down in history, bringing memories of Arafat and Rabin, McGuinness and Paisley, Manley and Seaga, Mandela and De Klerk. Since Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos shook hands with FARC rebel leader *alias* Timochenko in September, even the sceptics have had to accept that a peace deal is more likely than not, after five decades of conflict.

And there *are* sceptics on both sides. On the right, there are shrill warnings of a country being handed over to the guerrillas. And on the left, there are more legitimate criticisms that an end to formal conflict will mean little to millions of Colombians.

After all, some of the most despicable violence in Colombia in the past few decades was not carried out by the FARC but by the Colombian army and allied paramilitary groups.

Some even fear that, as in Central American countries, formal hostilities could simply metamorphose into disparate criminal violence.

Meanwhile, the Colombian president, for all his leadership in peace negotiations, is an old-fashioned market economist who explicitly wants to use a newly peaceful era to continue a classic growth plan based around low-value-added primary exports, with all the predictable consequences in one of the world's most unequal countries.

So, ask some of the veterans of years of struggle for peace and justice, what's to celebrate? The answer is that while there



Raul Arboleda/AFP/Getty Images

Cause for hope? The end to Colombia's 50-year civil war may hasten an end to forced disappearances like those denounced above by a woman in Medellín in September.

is still much to be done, this is an historic step forwards.

Without a peace agreement with the FARC, violent elements would continue to use counter-terrorism as an excuse to undermine democratic dissent. Civil society would still operate under threat, its limited resources diverted from calling for economic and social reform. And leftwing and liberal leaders will have little chance of reaching the upper ranks of democratic power.

An end to the conflict with the FARC does not mean the end of social conflict or of violence. But it is an important, if small, step towards a fairer and more peaceful Colombia.

Perhaps the closest historical comparison is Nixon and Mao. Only a conservative president, but one with, in this case, a liberal sentiment, could have brought (most of) his compatriots with him on this journey towards ending a brutal civil war. ■

Jonathan Glennie

UNITED NATIONS

Peacekeepers in disgrace

The United Nations is working to restore trust in its peacekeeping operations following recent cases of sexual abuse and use of excessive force by its troops. In August, the head of UN peacekeeping forces in the Central African Republic (CAR) resigned after Amnesty International revealed that peacekeepers raped a 12-year-old girl during a house search and indiscriminately killed a 16-year-old boy and his father during what witnesses describe as unprovoked firing in the streets of the capital, Bangui.*

As a result, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has released recommendations to prevent further incidents, including forming rapid-response teams, mechanisms for local people to complain, and in-country trials.

However, punishment for crimes

committed by peacekeepers is still the responsibility of their home countries. Rights groups say this means the UN response falls short of an adequate deterrent.

'When those assigned to protect and stabilize the lives of the most vulnerable do the opposite, it undercuts faith in the UN,' says Mark Lagon, president of Freedom House. 'These reforms are a good first step, but until peacekeepers are held to account for abuses rather than, at most, being recalled to their home country, abuses will persist.'

The CAR cases are the latest in at least two decades of allegations against peacekeepers. In 2003, the UN barred its peacekeepers from buying sex after a series of sexual misconduct scandals, and in 2005 it enacted a zero-tolerance policy for sexual abuse. Yet cases of abuse continue to emerge.

The UN claims that its

peacekeeping operations are needed now more than ever before in its 70-year history. But will its new measures be enough to re-kindle faith in its capabilities? ■

Tom Lawson

* See *Letter from Bangui* page 7

5 years ago...



...we were asking whether it was possible to create a zero-carbon world, a special issue seizing the opportunity of the climate summit in Cancún to present a more optimistic picture. Does any of this sound familiar, not least to those who read last month's issue on the lead-up to the climate



ON THE WEB
newint.org

The tiny Lebanese village taking more refugees than Britain

I wish people understood 'aid' better



ARGENTINA

Mapuche refuse fracking

Argentina's media howled in outrage in September as a two-day blockade by the Paynemil Mapuche community halted oil and gas production in Neuquen province.

Community leader Elba Paynemil wants guarantees that their land will not be developed for further oil and gas exploitation. 'We are peaceful people,' he says. 'We have been demanding these lands since 1900. Seventy per cent of our lands are already contaminated by oil.'

Neuquen has long been the heart of fossil-fuel production in Argentina but, with the announcement of massive gas reserves in the Vaca Muerta shale formation in 2011, a new front of resistance has sprung up. Indigenous people, environmentalists and trade unions have united against fracking, which they believe will sacrifice the entire province to the demands of the extractive industries.

As resistance has increased, so has repression. In a prominent case, Mapuche activist Relmu Ñamku found herself accused of attempted murder after a bailiff was hit by a stone during the forced eviction of the Winkul Newen community. 'For decades my community has been exposed to harassment and persecution,' Relmu responded, 'not to mention the violent environmental impact of the oil-drilling activities. No-one has ever been brought to justice and yet now I am facing the prospect of 15 years in prison.' ■

Claire Fauset

summit in Paris?

Ever since we first tackled global warming in earnest (back in April 1990) we have faced the perennial challenge of how to return to the same topic again and again without readers switching off in either boredom or despair. In a sense, it is the same problem faced by the mainstream media – except that, while they are all too willing to escape into celebrity fluff or consumerist propaganda, there is no real escape for us from the reality that this is the Mother of All Crises and that we need to keep up the pressure on politicians

Introducing...

Justin Trudeau

In October Canadian voters, against all the odds and all initial polling, elected Justin Trudeau and the Liberal Party to a majority government. Not only did the youthful Trudeau (45 years old) revive the near moribund Liberals (once considered the country's 'natural ruling party') but he led them in an assault against the most stubborn redoubt of neo-conservatism in the Western world. The contrast between the passionate and engaging Trudeau and the cold and cynical calculations of Conservative boss Stephen Harper could not have been more stark. Harper has presided over Canadian political life for a decade with an authoritarian neo-liberalism based on ruthless austerity at home and a belligerent foreign policy stance on everything from climate change denial to a blank cheque for Israeli expansionism. As he grew more desperate during the campaign, Harper cynically played the race card, privileging 'old stock' Canadians and promising an Islamophobic police phoneline to report 'barbaric cultural practices'. But

Canadians had had enough of Harper's divisiveness and his vote sank to less than a third of the electorate – the 'red meat' Conservative base.

Justin is the son of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Canadian Prime Minister for almost a decade and a half starting in the late 1960s. His programme commitments are modest, as befits the centrist Liberals, although his championing of reviving the public sphere, ending 'first-past-the-post' elections and greater taxes on the one per cent, allowed him to outflank the social democratic New Democratic Party (NDP) as the progressive alternative to Harper. The NDP took a Blairite turn, vainly presenting itself as a responsible 'government-in-waiting' (low taxes and balanced budgets) and forfeiting the mantle of populist outrage over Harperism. ■

Richard Swift



Alex Gubbard / wikipedia commons

SAUDI ARABIA

Rights defenders, really?

The founding charter of the United Nations includes 'universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all'. So the UN recently hit a new low when it announced the appointment of Faisal Bin Hassan Trad, Saudi Arabia's envoy

to the UN Human Rights Council, as Chair of an influential human rights panel. Trad will have the power to select applicants for scores of expert roles in countries where the UN has a mandate on human rights.

Such experts are often described as the 'crown jewels' of the Human Rights Council, according to UN Watch. With this latest appointment, control over the 'crown jewels' – at least 77 posts to deal with human rights violations and mandates – has been handed to a country with one of the worst human rights records in the world.

The Saudi government has beheaded more people during 2015 than ISIS, and could well be on target to break its own record of 192 executions in 12 months. This record was reached during the reign of King Abdullah, whose death in January prompted Western leaders to flock to Saudi Arabia to pay their respects.

In May, the Saudi government advertised for eight extra executioners for public beheadings. ■

Felicity Arbuthnot

Child brides: every two seconds



'Kill the Beef-eaters!'



'The earth in Indonesia is on fire'

IRAQ

Holding the line against ISIS

A new generation of journalists and activists who believe in a future based on peace and brotherhood are standing up to ISIS in Iraq.

Ammar Al Shahbander, my friend and mentor of more than 10 years, who headed up the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) mission in Iraq, was one of them. On 2 May 2015, I met him in the Karrada district of Baghdad, an area of cafés where artists and intellectuals meet to socialize and exchange ideas. As we were leaving, two car bombs exploded, killing Ammar and 16 others. I was seriously injured, lucky to survive.

ISIS claimed responsibility for the brutal attack. They targeted the Karrada district as a direct challenge to the very idea of an open, progressive society in Iraq.

One week earlier, the IWPR had brought together 150 artists, journalists and activists to articulate a new vision for our country. All targets of ISIS or sectarian violence, they listened to the ideas of human rights defenders from Kuwait, Lebanon and Algeria about how to shape the future of Iraq.

Since 2003, the IWPR has been working to train a new generation of journalists, breaking away from the old days of Saddam Hussein, when it was impossible to criticize the regime. While the current government may not be openly

hostile – some ministries have even recruited our trainees – we find ourselves negotiating a new set of red lines that reflect the social fragmentation of Iraq. When I write about ISIS atrocities, I anger their supporters. If I expose government corruption, I risk being threatened or prosecuted.

When I was treated in Germany after the bomb blast, people asked me why I wanted to return to Iraq. I came back because I believe in the future of my country. A majority of moderate opinion rejects the idea that ISIS represents Islam. I believe in supporting, and encouraging, those who have the courage to speak out. ■

Emad Al Sharaa
iwpr.net



Cultural resistance at a terrible cost: Iraqi activist Al Shahbander celebrated musical defiance of Isis with this tweet three months before dying in a car bomb strike on a Baghdad café.

INDIA/PAKISTAN

In search of lost soldiers

Indian families are still waiting for the return of men taken prisoner by Pakistan 44 years ago. Over 50

members of the Indian Security Forces remain unaccounted for. With successive Indian governments having failed to establish their fate, the prisoners' families continue their desperate search for their loved ones.

Though the Pakistani authorities acknowledge they took the men prisoner in the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war, they have since refused to explain what happened to them, and even denied their existence. However, a number of Indian prisoners of war released in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as Indian civilians released from Pakistani prisons, say they have met some of the missing officers.

Rajwant Kaur is the sister of Gurdev Singh Rai, one of the missing prisoners of war. Through her tears, she recalls the brother she admired and loved – who would now be in his early seventies. Rajwant Kaur vividly remembers watching a BBC news report in December 1971 which showed images of the Indian prisoners of war. She pointed out her brother and said: 'It will be a matter of a week or two before he is released.' It didn't happen. Their parents, who had pleaded with the authorities for his release, died still waiting for his return. Not a day goes by without Rajwant thinking about her brother.

Vijay Vasant Tambay was a former Olympian who represented India in badminton in the 1965 Olympics.

Scratchy Lines
by Simon Kneebone



GAMBIA

Good reasons to run

Among the masses of war-weary Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis, a steady trickle of migrants from the tiny West African country of Gambia continues to arrive in Europe. Gambia is not at war, but its economy is plummeting and it is the site of some of the continent's most severe human rights abuses.

President Yahya Jammeh periodically grabs global headlines, thanks to his bizarre claims to be able to cure HIV, Ebola and infertility. But his government rarely gets press attention for its grim human rights record.

Since taking power over two decades ago, Jammeh's government has brutally suppressed dissent, silenced virtually all independent media, and cracked down on journalists, opposition members, activists and anyone who dares to make critical remarks. After a December 2014 coup attempt, the situation deteriorated further.

In a report released in September, Human Rights Watch documented numerous abuses perpetrated by

Gambia's security forces, intelligence agents and a shadowy paramilitary group called the Junglurs that appears to act on behalf of the government. Abuses include torture, prolonged detention and enforced disappearances.

President Jammeh also has a long history of virulent anti-gay hate speech, most recently promising in May to slit the throats of gay people. Last October, he signed into law a series of new 'aggravated homosexuality' offences imposing life in prison. Shortly after, Gambian security forces arrested dozens of people, and brought prosecutions for 'unnatural acts'.

There have been some small positive steps. In July, Jammeh pardoned over 200 prisoners, including political prisoners. However, many opposition leaders and journalists remain in jail.

The international community is beginning to condemn human rights violations in Gambia. But while state security forces and paramilitary groups continue to abuse people with impunity, Gambia's state of fear will persist. ■

Felicity Thompson

He had only been married for a year when he was called to duty. His wife Damanyanti has not seen or heard from him since, save for a grainy photograph in the *Sunday Observer* of 5 December 1971 and a letter she received from him, sent from a Pakistani prison.

None of the families ever received either bodies or personal belongings. Following a petition to the Indian Supreme Court, the families do now receive backdated pensions, and will continue to do so since there is no evidence to confirm that the officers were killed during the war.

As time passes, there are fewer living family members to continue the fight for answers. Indian government attempts to raise the issue under its Bilateral Agreement with Pakistan have been met with denial and a lack of co-operation.

The families' last hope is to raise the issue at an international level. If the Supreme Court orders the government to refer the matter to the International Court of Justice, a new legal route for the families will be opened. This is the last chance for the officers' relatives to get answers and closure. ■

Jas Uppal

CHERNOBYL

Wolves and boars galore

New research has shown that the contaminated exclusion zone around the Chernobyl nuclear power plant is now chock-a-block with wild animals, including boar, elk, deer and wolves.

The nuclear accident forced 116,000 people out of their homes back in 1986. Since then, radiation levels have reduced in some places within the 4,750 square-kilometre exclusion zone, which stretches between Ukraine and Belarus, but they remain high in others; it is too dangerous for humans to return.

Left to their own devices, large mammals have thrived. The survey, conducted by helicopter and on the ground, showed many animal populations to be the same as, or higher than, in uncontaminated nature reserves.

Writing on TheConversation.com, ecologists Mike Wood and Nick Beresford came to the conclusion that 30 years without human agriculture, forestry or hunting have outweighed any adverse impacts of contamination. 'Radiation is most likely not good for animals,' they say, 'but removing humans definitely is.' ■

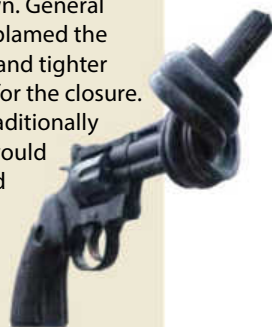
Hazel Healy

Reasons to be cheerful

Gun shop gone

The last store selling guns in San Francisco has closed down. General manager Steven Alcairo blamed the store's many opponents and tighter gun-control regulations for the closure.

It's welcome news in a traditionally anti-firearm city, which would have banned the sale and possession of guns back in 2005 were it not for a National Firearm Association lawsuit.



Engie comes clean (er)

French energy giant Engie has capitulated to popular pressure and announced it will stop investing in coal. Engie's dirty energy investments were proving to be a major embarrassment to the company and the French government, as Engie is a sponsor of this month's UN climate talks in Paris. Friends of the Earth is urging all energy transnationals to follow suit.

Solar lights up Lancashire

Anti-fracking campaigners are celebrating after Fylde Council unanimously approved a solar farm at a rejected fracking site in Lancashire, England. The Staining Wood solar farm is expected to be operational in March and will power around 1,300 homes, saving approximately 2,310 tonnes of CO₂ per year. Fracking company Cuadrilla spent years trying to access the site, but failed in the face of strong local opposition.

Carbon-neutral city race

Several authorities have announced their intention to become the world's first carbon-neutral city. Melbourne, Vancouver and Adelaide, the latest to join, all plan to have zero net emissions by 2020, while Copenhagen is aiming for 2025. Steps towards these goals include Adelaide setting a target for attracting \$7 billion in low-carbon investment and Copenhagen ordering 23,000 trees to be planted during 2016.





Illustrations: Belle Mellor

10 ECONOMIC MYTHS

Never underestimate the power of cherished ideas. They are clung to ever tighter when we are suffering reality's harshest knocks.

When it comes to economics, today's over-riding article of faith is of the rule of the market. If only it were completely free and global, with notions of governance and workers' rights out of the way, then the good capitalists would usher in an era of plenty with pickings for everyone, from top to bottom. Regulation, social provision, public ownership are all getting in the way, believers claim. Down with the public good, up with individual responsibility. You get what you deserve.

This economic orthodoxy is called

neoliberalism – 'neo' because it is a 20th/21st-century revival of the 18th-century school of liberal economics which called for the abolition of government intervention in manufacturing and trade.

It finds particular favour when elites govern. But it has no solutions for the economic crashes we have seen in recent years.

We need a more social, 'real world' vision of the economic sphere. Demands for this change are on the street and also in the academy with students protesting against the orthodoxy they are taught. It's in this spirit that we present 10 of the most damaging economic myths that we urgently need to ditch.

Written by Dinyar Godrej and David Ransom

1

Austerity will lead to 'jobs and growth'

Austerity as a cure for economic woes is a confidence trick. As a response to an off-the-rails financial system and the deep recession caused by the risky and often fraudulent behaviour of private banks, it defies belief. Not only is the buccaneering of the banks rewarded by huge sums of public money, but the suffering public must submit to their elected leaders sadistically tightening belts to gut-squishing proportions.

The con is of the steady hand on the tiller. Conservative politicians start to talk in what economist Paul Krugman calls 'hard choices boilerplate'. Times are hard so hard choices must be made; austerity is presented as the bitter pill that must be swallowed to return the economy to health. There will be increasing business confidence in the prudence of the

government and this, along with tax breaks for corporations, will provide the incentive for the business sector to invest more and create jobs.

However, the desired result has yet to materialize. According to Krugman: 'Since the global turn to austerity in 2010, every country that introduced significant austerity has seen its economy suffer, with the depth of the suffering closely related to the harshness of the austerity.'¹

The reason is clear. In a depressed economy with increased job insecurity and worsening welfare provision, people will want to hang on to their savings and not spend, prolonging the stagnation. The super-rich also see little reason to invest productively, preferring instead to build their asset portfolios and blow up property bubbles. If the government truly

wants to restore confidence (there's that word again) then it needs to spend, not cut, creating jobs in the public sector, offering the security of a more social state. If deficits are run, that's not the horror it has been made out to be, as interest rates are rock bottom anyway and the money being borrowed is being used productively rather than gathering dust.

However, the early adopters of austerity clearly thought this sounded too much like common sense and relied instead on off-beat economic theories of 'expansionist austerity' (which relied on statistical research that has been proven plain wrong since). The IMF, notorious for (along with the World Bank) imposing austerity on the Majority World during the 1980s debt crises, undertook a wide-ranging study of austerity measures after the 2007/08 financial crisis and declared that austerity has a negative impact on growth. One only has to look at Greece and Spain, undergoing harsh austerity despite the contrary desires of their people and where over 50 per cent of young people today cannot find a job, for the clearest demonstration of that negative impact.

The US establishment has since become openly critical of austerity, and was itself being urged by financial analysts Bloomberg earlier this year to increase public spending and hiring to give a boost to the economy.²

In Britain, meanwhile, the Conservatives never miss a turn to declare that their austerity policies are paying off. But Cambridge economist Ha-Joon Chang reveals another picture. The official narrative of a higher national income breaks down thus – real wages have fallen by 10 per cent since 2008, while the wealthiest increased their share of wealth. As for job creation – he finds that the proportion of underemployed workers forced to accept fewer hours due to a lack of work has shot up fourfold. Self-employment, too, has jumped – a sign of desperation rather than 'a sudden burst of entrepreneurial energy', he finds.³ The Institute for Fiscal Studies believes that by 2020, an additional 800,000, or one in four,

British children will be living in poverty.⁴

No wonder Nobel-prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz described austerity plans in 2012 as a 'suicide pact' that would lead countries into a 'vicious cycle of spending cuts and slumping growth'. But here's another smokescreen – the austerity agenda has little to do with strong governance, but is entirely ideological. As the alternative policy group Transnational Institute commented at the start of 2013: 'Corporate and political elites, rather than learning from the crisis, are using it as a pretext to deepen neoliberalism and remove obstacles, including workers' rights and much of the welfare state, which hinder greater corporate domination.'⁵ Austerity is being used as a tool for ever-increasing privatization, either with the collusion of a moneyed elite in government (as in Britain), or by the imposition of it on crisis-hit countries (as in the loan conditions attached by the 'Troika' of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF to European countries).

Austerity's harvest has been of growing inequality, as governments have ditched social spending to reduce poverty and sought to incentivize the idle rich rather than small businesses. Large corporations today divert increasingly large amounts of their profits to CEOs and shareholders with the share for their workforce continually shrinking. Meanwhile, the political discourse remains of tough measures for tough times which will reward hard workers and come down hard on shirkers. It's a confidence trick with an emotional appeal to a significant number of voters, who see it as unfair but necessary, even while there is no evidence that it actually works. ■

Dinyar Godrej

¹ 'The austerity delusion', *The Guardian*, 29 April 2015, nln.tl/Krugman-austerity ² 'Here's how you add 2.4 million jobs to the economy', Bloomberg 28 May 2015, nln.tl/USJ-addjobs

³ 'Why did Britain's political class buy into the Tories' economic fairytale?', *The Guardian*, 19 October 2014, nln.tl/economic-fairytale ⁴ Oxfam, 'The true cost of austerity and inequality', September 2013, nln.tl/cost-austerity ⁵ Joseph Zacune, *Privatising Europe*, TNI working paper, March 2013, nln.tl/private-europe

Times are hard so hard choices must be made; austerity is presented as the bitter pill that must be swallowed



On 14 October, Canadians voted against austerity by giving Justin Trudeau's Liberal party a majority win. Trudeau has pledged to run deficits for the next three years in order to boost the economy through public-sector spending.

'If you diet when you are sick, it's quite probable you'll get a lot sicker, so it's not a good idea.'

Nicoletta Batini, the economist who was instrumental in altering the International Monetary Fund's pro-austerity position.

'There is a strong recognition all over the world that fiscal austerity pursued by many governments has been the main cause for the protracted economic downturn.'

Jomo Kwama Sundaram, UN assistant secretary-general for economic development at the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, speaking in 2012.

2

Deficit reduction is the only way out of a slump

In April 2009 I was invited to appear on the BBC News Channel. The G20 group of rich countries was staging a Summit in London. World leaders were in a state of ill-concealed panic about the financial crisis. None seemed to have the faintest idea what was going on. I was asked by the BBC presenter: 'Is this the end of capitalism as we know it, then?' It did for once seem like a reasonable question to be asked, even by the makers of BBC News.

At the time, limitless quantities of public treasure were being poured into the collapsed financial 'architecture'. Yet more public treasure was being lavished on a 'fiscal stimulus' to salvage the 'real' economy. Old cars were bought up and scrapped so that more new ones might be sold, and fewer jobs lost. General

Motors – once the biggest corporation in the world – was to be saved from bankruptcy.

At the time, no-one dared suggest anything else. Not even neoliberal economists. For a generation it was they who had been directing government policies, secure in the knowledge that markets always 'self-correct'. None of this was supposed to be happening. For once, they were lost for words.

Where had all that money come from? Where had it gone? Why had no-one seen it coming? What next? No-one could say. You did not need to be an economic genius to sense that private debts were once more being dumped on the public, just as they had been by an escalating series of financial crises around the world, starting with the 'Third World' financial crises of the 1980s.

But you would have had to live through the experience of 'structural adjustment' in the Majority World to foresee that by the end of that same year, 2009, the neoliberals would be back in the saddle, brazenly suggesting that the calamity had been caused by 'too much government spending'.

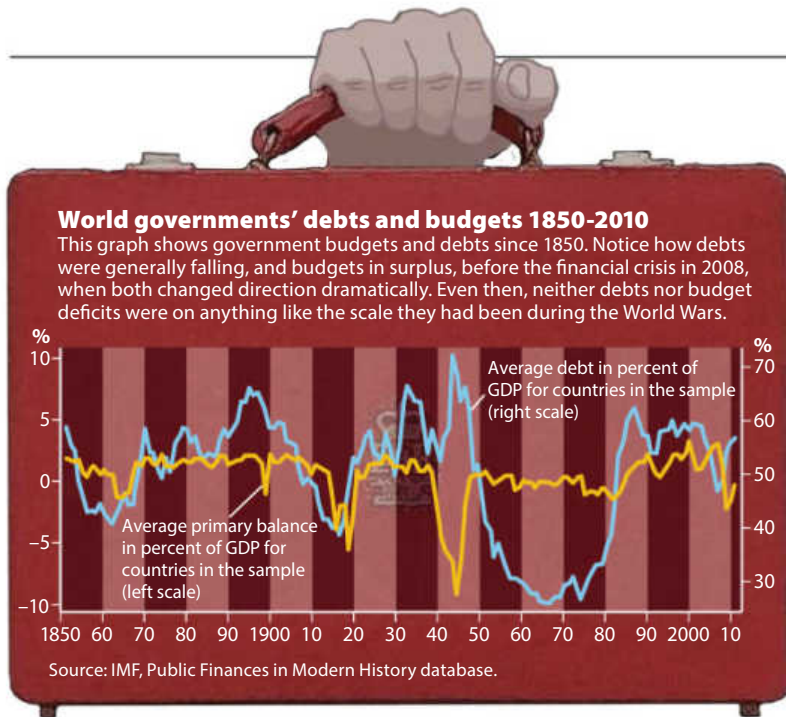
As soon as financial markets had been bailed out, fiscal stimulus for the real economy was stopped. Instead, supposedly independent central banks – in reality the creatures of governments – started handing free 'helicopter' money to private banks and financial markets, leaving them to decide what to do with it. In other words, the very institutions that had caused the Great Recession would be relied on to end it. With interest rates now lower and for longer than in recorded economic history, quantitative easing* has risen to \$5 trillion worldwide, and counting.¹

It was, and remains, little more than an ingenious accounting trick. Quantitative easing features in the accounts of central banks, not governments. Now that the banks no longer needed government funds, the priority was to cut government budget deficits, public employment and services – indeed, to cut the very notion of 'too much government spending' to 'too much government, full stop'.

All of this because of one quite blatant falsehood – the claim that governments had been 'borrowing too much'. In fact, research by the International Monetary Fund shows the opposite to be true (see graph overleaf).

Before the 'credit crunch' in 2007, public debt and budget deficits were in fact falling quite sharply. Both had been higher and





rising faster towards the end of the 1980s, when the impact of neoliberal economic policies was first being felt. Both were very much higher during the two World Wars, the second of which cost just about as much treasure as the Great Recession has thus far.²

The difference was that huge government borrowing and budget deficits during the Second World War had to be spent on the real economy and employment, even though that often meant real guns, tanks, death and destruction. This finally brought an end to the protracted Depression of the 1930s. A 'Golden Age' of capitalist prosperity followed in the 1950s and 1960s, reducing both the debts and the budget deficits of governments.

Since 2008, by contrast, public funds have been given to financial markets, not to the real economy and employment. So the Great Recession has continued, just like the Depression. We might well be left to conclude

that it would take even bigger wars to put an end to the Great Recession.

The world as a whole is never in debt or deficit: for every debtor there is always a creditor, for every deficit a surplus. As the chief economist of none other than Goldman Sachs – the financial 'vampire squid' at the heart of the financial crisis – has pointed out, public debts are always matched by private savings.³ Crises happen, as in 2007, when private savings rise, withdrawn from the real economy. Public debt rises at the same time. If it isn't spent on the real economy to replace private saving, the crisis continues.

In truth, at the root of the Great Recession lies a 'liquidity trap' – too many people with too little income to make the real economy healthy enough for private savings to be invested in it.⁴ So long as this has continued, so has the Great Recession.

If you're more interested in a certain brand of politics, the exercise has been a great success. An economic myth has prevailed over the truth. Reactionary policies verging on the deranged have become the hallmark of sound economic management.

Neoliberals like to ask how a crisis caused by debt can be resolved by more debt. The rest of us might ask how a catastrophe caused by financial markets can be resolved by financial markets. ■

David Ransom

* Quantitative easing (QE) is an unconventional form of monetary policy where a Central Bank creates new money electronically to buy financial assets, like government bonds. The aim is to increase private-sector spending in the economy.

1 Andrew Haldane, *How Low Can You Go?*, Bank of England, 18 September 2015, nin.tl/Haldane-speech **2** Martin Wolf, *The Shifts and the Shocks – what we've learned from the financial crisis*, Penguin, 2014. **3** 'Goldman's Top Economist Explains The World's Most Important Chart, And His Big Call For The US Economy', *Business Insider*, 10 December 2012, nin.tl/Goldman-economist **4** Paul Krugman, *End This Depression Now*, WW Norton, 2013.

3 Taxing the rich scares off investors and stalls economic performance

An economic myth of neoliberalism is that private enterprise creates prosperity; taxation destroys it. So the less taxation there is, the more prosperous we'll become. Competition between societies to cut tax attracts investment and encourages the creation of wealth.

In reality, without publicly funded education, healthcare, infrastructure and employment (let alone bailouts), private enterprise would be unable to function at all. Taxation creates prosperity every bit as much

as private enterprise. Tax 'wars' that promote a 'race to the bottom' for tax levels, a 'race to the top' for cheating, threaten to impoverish, even destroy, societies. Shrewd investors – and even rich individuals – know this better than most. The idea that they only invest productively in the places with the most 'competitive' levels of tax is nonsense.

What, then, is the right level or kind of taxation? That is a political rather than economic question. In a democracy, basic principles of

fairness are more likely to apply. 'Progressive' tax means the broadest shoulders carry the greatest burden. 'Regressive' tax, such as consumption taxes (VAT, GST and the like) paid at the same level by everyone, works the other way about.

Famously, the Nordic countries of Sweden, Norway and Denmark have among the highest and most progressive tax regimes in the world – yet they also feature regularly among the most prosperous and successful societies. When taxes in Sweden were increased to 60 per cent during the financial crisis in 2008, opinion polls reported that most Swedes were happy to pay them.¹ You don't have to want to live in Sweden to know that progressive taxation does not stall economic performance.

Neoliberalism has spawned regressive taxation and cheating. Funding an enormous industry of consultants, and weaving an elaborate web of havens, has become far more lucrative for wealthy corporations and individuals than paying the tax collector. The very wealthiest have ended up paying no tax at all. In effect, they are being subsidized by everyone else, including more rooted and numerous local enterprises.

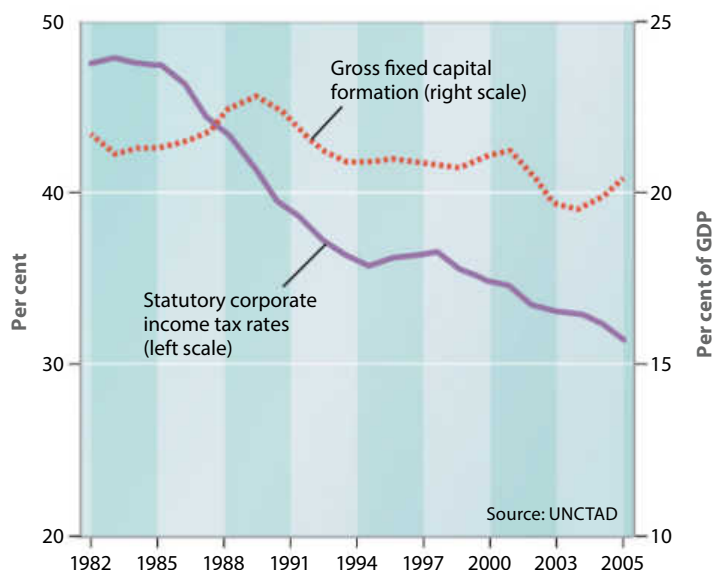
All of this has been thrown into sharp relief by the Great Recession. Government borrowing and budget deficits only happen because tax receipts are insufficient to cover spending commitments. During a recession, tax revenues fall. On the face of it, increasing them threatens to make things worse – but then, so does cutting public expenditure. Another essentially political choice.

In Britain – a notorious shelter for tax havens – taxes on corporations and rich individuals have actually been cut, while VAT has increased sharply. Tax wars and regressive taxation have become defining features of 'austerity'. But they've done nothing to stimulate investment. At the end of 2014, investment fell further than at any time since 2009;² already lower than in the rest of the European Union, it has fallen consistently since 2009.³

Neoliberal tax regimes are not a given. There are other ways of seeing. Suppose, for example, we look at private wealth – corporate as well as personal – rather than income. Thomas Piketty estimates that governments on average now have no wealth at all. Their debts are roughly equal to their assets. Private assets, however, are six times greater than private debts. A one-off 'flat' tax of just 15 per cent on private assets, he suggests, 'would yield nearly a year's worth of national income and thus allow for immediate reimbursement of all outstanding public debt'.⁴

Piketty is not hopeful that such a tax will be raised any time soon, at least while neoliberalism prevails. The same might well apply to 'transaction' taxes on financial speculation, such as a 'Tobin' tax on currency dealing – which would have the added beneficial effect of discouraging financial mayhem.

Corporate income tax rates and gross fixed capital formation, average of selected countries, 1982-2005



Both would help to solve persistent economic problems.

One kind of realism suggests that the prospects for better, fairer tax regimes are, well, not very realistic. Another kind of realism tells us that neoliberal tax regimes rely on myths and propaganda. In reality, quite modest taxes on wealth would produce more than enough resources to turn the Great Recession on its head. That might even please shrewd investors. ■

David Ransom

¹ *The Guardian*, 16 November 2008. ² *The Guardian*, 15 February 2015. ³ European Commission, 'Investment in the United Kingdom', nin.tl/UK-investment ⁴ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Harvard University Press, 2014.

Taxation creates prosperity every bit as much as private enterprise

‘As a businessman I never made an investment decision based on the tax code. If you are giving money away I will take it. If you want to give me inducements for something I am going to do anyway, I will take it. But good businesspeople do not do things because of inducements.’

Paul O'Neill, former chair of Alcoa

‘Every country sets its own tax rates, but I think in a world of global capital, in a world where we're competing with each other, in a world where we want to send a message that we want you to build businesses, grow businesses and invest, I think it's wrong to have completely uncompetitive top rates of tax.’

David Cameron, British Prime Minister

4

Economic migrants are a drain on rich world economies

There's a special opprobrium reserved for those who move to a wealthier country to work and try to improve their lot. They are 'undeserving', unlike refugees fleeing violence who can gain a certain grudging acceptance if they have been victimized enough (although usually accompanied with cries of 'but we have our own problems' and 'we can't cope').

In the Netherlands, where I live, economic migrants are often referred to pejoratively as *gelukszoekers* or chancers. One literal translation of the word – 'happiness seekers' – is supremely ironic considering the disgust with which it is deployed. A recent poll of 2,000 people found 75 per cent agreeing that there should be fewer immigrants in this category as opposed to a much smaller 26 per cent who wanted fewer war refugees.¹

In the public mind, inflamed by the rhetoric of both mainstream media and politicians seeking to distract the electorate from the ravages of austerity, economic migrants are perceived as guzzling public services when not stealing jobs and lowering wages.

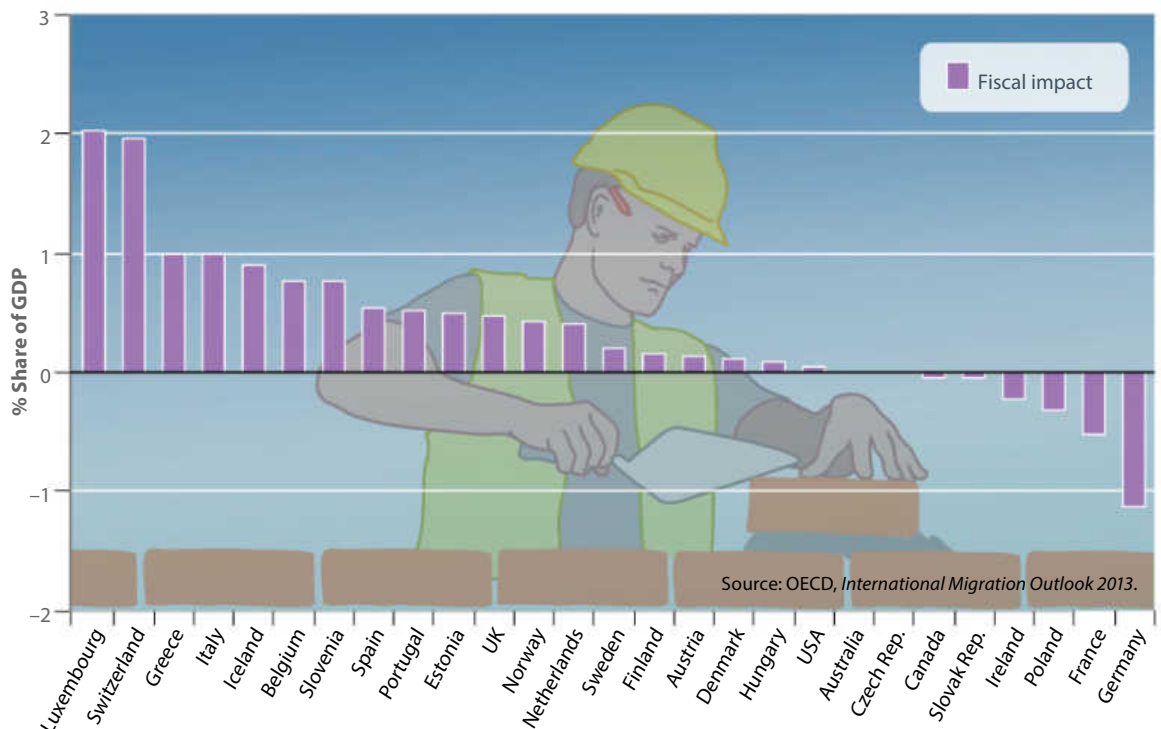
But looked at more soberly, in the light of research, such imagined impacts are wide of the mark.

On average across the 34 wealthy nations of the OECD, immigrant households made a net annual contribution of €2,500 (\$2,800) each – that's how much more they contributed in taxes than they received in public provision.²

In a 2014 study, researchers at University College London found that non-European immigrants to Britain (the most maligned group) were less likely to be on state benefits than natives and had contributed a net £5 billion in taxes between 2000 and 2011.³ Rather than draining public services, they were providing a much needed infusion that would benefit the rest of the population. As for social housing, new migrants made up less than two per cent of users.⁴ That battle lies elsewhere – in a government that sells off social housing while doing nothing to ease housing shortages in an overheated property market that benefits only the well-to-do.

The evident truth is that migration follows a demand for labour. And while politicians may talk tough, immigration policies have actually become somewhat less restrictive for high-skilled migrants and, sometimes, even for low-wage earners.⁵ Meanwhile, a double standard persists – when individuals from wealthy

Fiscal impact of migration, 2007-09



countries set off to more lucrative jobs in foreign lands this is viewed as entirely normal or ‘following a dream’.

Economic migrants tend to be young, enterprising and often bring skills that are in demand in recipient countries. They can ease pressures on an ageing workforce, pay into the pension pot and bring a dynamism to the economy. Over the longer term, as they themselves age, this positive impact evened out. Nonetheless, in Britain, the Office for Budget Responsibility predicted that if the country were to follow a high net-migration trajectory, government debt could be halved over 50 years through the input of working migrants.

A curious extreme is worth noting. Libertarian economists – the kind who worship market forces and demand the removal of all trade barriers – are avid advocates of mass economic migration, believing that this influx of labour would make world GDP shoot sky high.⁶ They see the imposition of immigration restrictions as a missed opportunity equivalent to leaving trillion-dollar bills lying on the sidewalk. Of course, the scale of immigration that would be required to achieve the ‘results’ suggested by their models would depopulate the Global South and is not going to happen.

Meanwhile, back in the real world and sticking to the evidence at hand, the more pressing issues are whether economic migrants take jobs and depress wages. Studies in this area show that if anyone is crowded out of the jobs market it tends to be the most recent former migrants. Where migrants have depressed wages in lower-income groups, it is on a very small scale and is usually temporary – one survey of OECD countries found it to be in the region of 0.12 per cent for a one-per-cent increase in immigrants.⁴

And there are studies that demonstrate the opposite. One study by economists Mette Foged and Giovanni Peri covered every single worker in Denmark from 1991 to 2008 and tracked how they responded to immigration, including large influxes of refugees from Somalia and Afghanistan. People who lived in communities which received the migrants saw their wages grow more rapidly than communities without migrants.⁷

The battle against low wages is also elsewhere – to be waged against political policies that favour the rich and create job insecurity. The ILO proposes that the way to strengthen growth and employment is to address inequality (the declining labour income share), minimum wages, collective labour bargaining and better social protections.

According to migration economist Michael Clemens: ‘Low-skill immigrants end up both taking jobs and creating jobs. The balance has

‘In most countries, migrants pay more in taxes and social contributions than they receive, and they contribute substantially to destination countries’ economies. Across the advanced countries, the number of highly educated immigrants has increased rapidly over the past decade, which has important implications for productivity and innovation. In origin countries, remittances help lift thousands out of poverty, keep children in school and build better futures. Return migrants bring home the human, social and financial capital acquired abroad.’⁹

International Labour Organization Director-General **Guy Ryder** addressing G20 Labour and Employment ministers, 3 September 2015.

been positive even in places where politicians and activists say that it must be negative. Communicating that fact will be a permanent challenge, because the ways that immigrants fill jobs are direct and visible; the ways they create jobs are indirect and invisible.⁸

Finally, a splash of cold water. Whereas migration can bring positive economic results in the short term, in the long term the fiscal impact of migration over the last 50 years to the wealthy OECD countries has been, on average, close to zero – rarely going beyond 0.5 per cent of GDP either in the positive or negative direction.² Migrants over this longer time frame can no longer be distinguished from other citizens. So why all the fuss and bother? ■

Dinyar Godrej

Economic migrants are perceived as guzzling public services when not stealing jobs and lowering wages

¹ I&O Research poll published in *De Volkskrant*, 15 August 2015. ² OECD, *International Migration Outlook* 2013. ³ As reported in Debora MacKenzie, ‘Refugees welcome: the numbers add up’, *New Scientist*, 12 September 2015. ⁴ nef, *Why the cap won’t fit: Global migration realities 2010-2050*, 2010. ⁵ Hein de Haas, ‘Human migration: Myths, hysteria and facts’, 24 July 2014, nin.tl/migration-myths ⁶ The website Open Borders: The Case offers a good collection of the arguments: openborders.info ⁷ *Immigrants and native workers: New analysis using longitudinal employer-employee data*, 27 February 2014, nin.tl/immigrant-native-workers ⁸ Interview on vice.com, 29 April 2015.

Next month’s edition
takes an in-depth look at
Migration.



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'I predict...'

Economists claim to be scientists who can predict how 'rational' people, markets and economies will behave. Their record suggests otherwise.

Irving Fisher, the most influential US economist of his time, said in October 1929 that the stock market had reached a 'permanently high plateau'. Less than two weeks later the stock market crashed – and didn't recover for the next 25 years.

'Commentators quote economic studies alleging that market downturns predicted four out of the last five recessions. That is an understatement. Wall Street indexes predicted nine out of the last five recessions!'

Paul Samuelson, writing in 1966. His *Economics*, first published in 1948, remains the best-selling economic textbook of all time.

Alan Greenspan, former boss of the US Federal Reserve, in his 2007 book *The Age of Turbulence* predicted that double-digit interest rates would soon be needed to control inflation. Interest rates, and inflation, fell lower and for longer than in recorded economic history.

'There is going to be, I predict, in the weeks and months ahead, a very painful tug of war between our monetary policy and our fiscal policy... That will drive up interest rates.'

Niall Ferguson, neoliberal economic historian, 2009.

'The cost of forecasting a recession that does not materialize may be perceived as higher than that of having wrongly predicted a boom.'

International Monetary Fund, Independent Evaluation Office, 2014, trying to account for the failure of its own forecasts to predict the Great Recession.

'Around this time last year, Stephen Poloz and the Bank of Canada were confidently predicting a pretty decent 2015 for the Canadian economy. Gross domestic product would grow at an annual rate of 2.5 per cent in the first three months of the year... Statistics Canada reported in late May that the economy actually shrank by 0.6 per cent.'

The Globe and Mail, 21 June 2015.

But there were others who noted that economists' predictions were not all they were cut out to be...

'The purpose of studying economics is not to acquire a set of ready-made answers to economic questions, but to learn how to avoid being deceived by economists.'

Joan Robinson, author of *The Accumulation of Capital* in 1956.

'The only function of economic forecasting is to make astrology look respectable.'

John Kenneth Galbraith, author of *The Affluent Society* in 1958.

5

The private sector is more efficient than the public sector

The abiding myth of mainstream economics is that governments should minimize their role in the economy – or, put another way, get out of the way of the accumulative drive of the rich. It's an ideological position that suits governing elites and has led, among other things, to a fire sale of public assets and the increasing privatization of what were once public goods and services. The magic of the market and the vigour of private enterprise will make the cream of cost-effectiveness and efficiency rise to the top. At least, that's how it's spun.

Increasingly also, sell-offs are seen as a way for governments to 'cut debt and plug budget deficits', regardless of common-sense doubts that this may not be for the best as, usually, you can't sell the same thing twice. Thus *The Wall Street Journal* applauded Australia and New Zealand/Aotearoa's record privatizations in 2013, by gushing: 'Their privatization sprees have injected needed cash into government coffers and freed the governments to focus on their core missions while injecting life into both markets.'¹

It's a view probably shared by George Osborne, Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer, who complained, in a 2010 budget speech, of the public sector 'crowding out' the private sector, pinning his hopes on the private sector providing 'a genuine and long-lasting economic recovery'.

But what does privatization in its varied forms – outright sales of companies, public-private partnerships, outsourcing – deliver? Does it lead to greater technical efficiency or effectiveness in providing a service? That privatized businesses will aim for cost efficiencies is a given, but that usually means a lower level of service or pay cuts for workers, job insecurity and job losses, which all have their deadening effects on the wider economy if one is willing to look that far.

By now privatization has been thoroughly scrutinized – there are numerous studies, surveys and, indeed, surveys of surveys of its effects. The consistent conclusion: there is no evidence of greater efficiency.² So, the best outcome one can hope for is that private-sector ownership or involvement is no worse than what

the public sector provides – hardly a turn-up for the books. The largest study of the efficiency of privatized companies looked at all European companies privatized during 1980-2009. It compared their performance with companies that remained public and with their own past performance as public companies. The result? The privatized companies performed worse than those that remained public and continued to do so for up to 10 years after privatization.²

Even in the super-competitive telecoms sector, where customers have benefited from lower costs and increasing variety of services over the years, this result holds. A global survey found that 'privatized sectors perform significantly worse' than telecom companies remaining in state hands.²

Healthcare is where this myth is really given the lie. In the US, where healthcare spending is at its peak, with private spending on healthcare exceeding public spending, basic health outcomes are worse than in Cuba – which spends a fraction of the US amount per person in a totally public healthcare system (see table below).

A 2012 report by the US Institute of Medicine was damning:

'30 cents of every medical dollar goes to unnecessary healthcare, deceitful paperwork, fraud and other waste. The \$750 billion in annual waste is more than the Pentagon budget and more than enough to care for every American who lacks health insurance... Most of the waste came from unnecessary services (\$210 billion annually), excess administrative costs (\$190 billion) and inefficient delivery of care (\$130 billion).'²

That same year government had to step in with the Affordable Care Act (also known as ObamaCare) to try to rectify a bloated system that was clearly failing poor citizens.

In Britain, creeping part-privatization of the National Health Service through outsourcing has led to similar 'penny wise, pound foolish' outcomes. One example: in Cornwall, the private contractor Serco, which provided call-centre cover for out-of-hours GP services, decided to economize by replacing clinicians



23.1% higher prices, on average, charged by private electricity companies compared with public ones in the 34 wealthy OECD countries, 2010.

16.6% higher – the price of water provided by private companies in France, compared to municipal provision of water.

96% of Italians voted in a referendum in 2011 to keep their water services public.

	Public spending on healthcare (% of GDP)	Private spending on healthcare (% of GDP)	Life expectancy at birth (2010)	Infant mortality rate (2011)	GNI per capita US\$
USA	8.29	9.1	78.2	6.4	48,450 (2011)
Cuba	9.72	0.91	79.0	4.5	5,460 (2008)

Source: PSIRU, *Public and private sector efficiency*, May 2014.

with call-handlers without medical training, who followed a set of computerized cues to make decisions about ambulance call-outs. This resulted in a very expensive four-fold increase in ambulance call-outs with the cost to be borne, of course, by the taxpayer.³

Public healthcare systems are more efficient partly because they provide universal coverage and can benefit from economies of scale. They require proper funding. The very opposite was proposed by the IMF and World Bank for many Majority World countries during the devastating structural-adjustment programmes of the

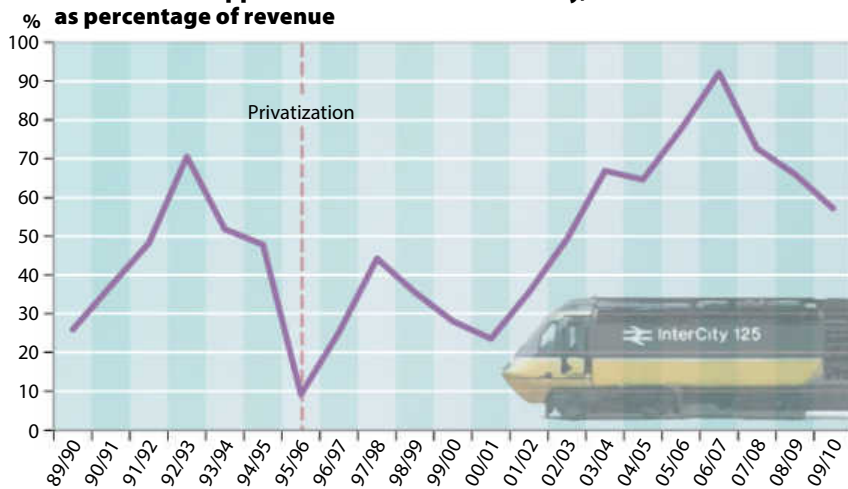
1980s. Then the mantra was that the state must withdraw, and let patients pay at the point of use. The result has been: the poorest people have been effectively stripped of healthcare while superior services are available, but only to those who can afford them.

To say that the public sector can perform just as well as, and often better than, the private sector is not to argue that it does not need reform in many instances. The public sector can be equally blighted with problems of corruption at the higher levels of management. But active unions and engaged service users can provide

a check, and public consultation has a democratic advantage, as in the case of South Africa, where municipal unions have formed alliances with communities in order both to fight the privatization of water and sanitation services and to get greater accountability within the organizations they work for.⁴ ■

Dinyar Godrej

Government support to the British rail industry, as percentage of revenue



Source: Andrew Simms, "The private sector is more efficient than the public sector", nef and Tax Justice Network, April 2013.

¹ New Zealand/Aotearoa ranked first globally in privatization via share offers that year, raising \$3.7 billion, and Australia was second in direct asset sales, \$9.65 billion. 'Privatization raises billions in Australia, New Zealand', *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 November 2015, nln.tl/Aus-and-NZ-privatization ² PSIRU, *Public and private sector efficiency*, May 2014, nln.tl/PSIRU-efficiency ³ Andrew Simms, "The private sector is more efficient than the public sector", Mythbusters series from nef and Tax Justice Network, April 2013, nln.tl/nef-report ⁴ For a detailed discussion see, Hilary Wainwright, *The tragedy of the private, the potential of the public*, PSI and TNI, 2014, nln.tl/alternatives-to-privatization

“The myth of private-sector superiority has three components that feed off and reinforce one another. First, that the private sector is always dynamic and best; second, that the public sector is costly and inefficient; and third, the conclusion that everyone benefits from the continual incremental privatization of the public sphere. All three elements are false.”

Andrew Simms, British author and campaigner

“People often don’t understand the engine that drives corruption. Particularly in India, they assume government equals corruption, private companies equal efficiency. But government officials are not genetically programmed to be corrupt. Corruption is linked to power. If it is the corporations that are powerful, then they will be corrupt.”

Arundhati Roy, Indian author and public intellectual

“Privatization means you take a public institution and give it to an unaccountable tyranny. Public institutions have many side benefits. They’re not out for profit. They may purposely run at a loss because of the side benefits. So, for example, if a public steel industry runs at a loss it’s providing cheap steel to other industries. Maybe that’s a good thing. Public institutions can have a counter-cyclic property. So that means that they can maintain employment in periods of recession, which increases demand, which helps you to get out of recession. Private companies can’t do that in a recession. Throw out the work force because that’s the way you make money.”

Noam Chomsky, speaking in the film *The Corporation* (2003).

6

Fossil fuels are more economically viable than renewables

Fossil fuels have reached an emperor's new clothes moment – the reflection in the mirror is not looking good and there's nary a fig leaf to hand. For years the industry has played up the high costs of renewables and painted a gloomy picture of the technological advancements required. But the technology has caught up – and both installation and generation costs of renewables have dived.

So even with oil prices at a historic low and coal still plentiful, renewables are giving fossil fuels a run for their money. In 2013 in Australia, the price of energy from wind power had fallen below that from new build coal- and gas-fired power stations. This is comparing like with like – energy from Australia's old coal-fired power stations dating from the 1970s and 80s

is cheaper, but only because their construction costs have been recouped.

Michael Liebrich of Bloomberg, the financial data giant, observed: 'The fact that wind power is now cheaper than coal and gas in a country with some of the best fossil fuel resources shows that clean energy is a game changer which promises to turn the economics of power systems on its head.'¹

It's a similar picture elsewhere. In 2014 in the US, both wind- and solar-generated energy came in lower – and even went one better. Emily Williams of the American Wind Energy Association told *The New York Times*: 'We're finding that in certain regions with certain wind projects, these are competing or coming in below the cost of even existing generation sources.'² And this year onshore wind power in Britain also beat its competitors. According to Bloomberg: 'The world is now adding more capacity for renewable power each year than coal, natural gas and oil combined.'³

It's blindingly obvious – with improved technology pushing costs down, there is no escaping the fact that the fuels concerned, wind and air, are absolutely free. Even water resources for wave power do not need to get 'used up'.

All the more reason to call for greater government subsidies and investment in technologies to crack the problems that so far can't be dealt with by renewables – such as fuelling heavy transport – and upscaling output. Because the news on the oil front is not as rosy as the low prices at the pump suggest. The US, currently producing the world's largest oil surplus, is going for bust. But large parts of the industry are in trouble trying to maintain the low prices. Around 75,000 jobs have already been lost.⁴

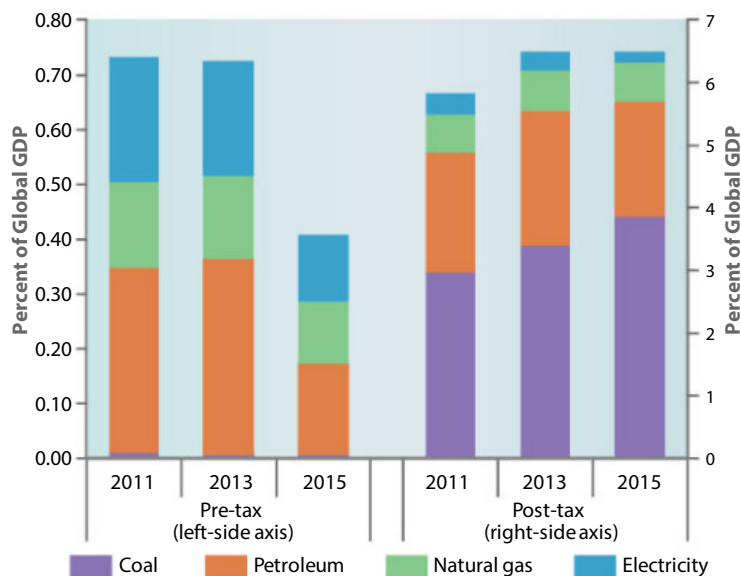
Meanwhile, the frackers are deep in debt – they have spent faster than they made money, even when oil prices were high. In the first quarter of this year they were spending \$4.15 for every dollar earned selling oil and gas.⁵ It's anyone's guess how much longer this situation will continue.

But what is truly unsustainable is the environmental damage of fossil fuels. If one were to try and monetize it, as the IMF did earlier this year, then not asking fossil-fuel producers to pay up amounts to an eye-watering subsidy. The IMF calculated it as a global subsidy to fossil-fuel companies of \$5.3 trillion a year – or \$10 million every single minute – equivalent to 6.5 per cent of the world's GDP. Of this



Global energy subsidies by energy product, 2011-15

Pre-tax (or direct) subsidies left axis; post-tax subsidies (environmental damage not paid for by the producer) right axis



Source: IMF, nin.tl/IMF-subsidies

just six per cent was direct subsidies on fuel; the rest was the estimated cost of environmental damage (including the health bill caused by air pollution) paid for by all of us. This the IMF terms 'post-tax subsidies' and refers to their 'perverse environmental, fiscal, macroeconomic and social consequences'.⁶

Of course, such calculations cannot cover everything. It would be obscene, for example, to put a monetary cost on a life cut short due to fossil fuel-related air pollution. ■

Dinyar Godrej

1 Bloomberg, 'Renewable energy now cheaper than new fossil fuels in Australia', 7 February 2013, nin.tl/ozrenewables
2 nin.tl/renewables-win **3** Tom Randall, 'Fossil fuels just lost the race against renewables', 14 April 2015, nin.tl/lost-race
4 Richard Heinberg, 'Goldilocks zone for oil prices is gone for good', Reuters, 24 March 2015, nin.tl/gone-for-good **5** Asjlynn Loder, 'The shale industry could be swallowed by its own debt', Bloomberg, 19 June 2015, nin.tl/shale-debt **6** IMF Working Paper, *How large are global energy subsidies?*, 2015, nin.tl/IMF-subsidies

See our recent publication *NoNonsense – Renewable Energy* by Danny Chivers for a practical blueprint for fairer, cleaner energy for all. nin.tl/renewablesbook

7 Financial regulation will destroy a profitable banking sector

By and large, regulation has been pretty good for bankers. Among other things, they need protection from each other

It's not the principle of financial regulation that can be in dispute, but the practice. By and large, regulation has been pretty good for bankers. Among other things, they need protection from each other. Without some form of regulation – and weak regulators to carry the can when things go awry – they would be unable to function at all.

In the 1950s and 1960s, higher levels of financial regulation accompanied relatively rapid increases in general prosperity, and almost no financial crises. Banks did as well out of that as anyone else.

When financial deregulation began in the 1980s, general prosperity stagnated and financial crises multiplied. Banks became more profitable than any other economic sector, accounting for as much as 40 per cent of all corporate profits in the US.¹

This might have resembled banking bliss, had the story stopped there. But of course it didn't. 'I have found a flaw,' a shocked Alan Greenspan – the Great Deregulator while he was boss of the US Federal Reserve – revealed

in October 2008.² The theory of self-regulating financial markets that had justified deregulation turned out to be completely wrong. So wrong, in fact, that the meltdown caused by the banks had wiped out – among other things – their own mega-profits from the years before.

Deregulation had not been an unqualified success, then, even for the banks. It would have been a terminal disaster, had it not been for just one thing. Banks can blackmail entire societies by threatening to halt the flow of money altogether. So their losses were hastily bailed out by governments, and 'austerity' was imposed on the general public instead.

The central bankers' bank, the Bank for International Settlements, has been overseeing a slow 'recapitalization' of banks, due to be completed some time around 2019. The theory is that the more of their own money they are required to hold in reserve, the less likely banks are to need bailing out. But they would also have less money to lend, and would make less profit. So the banks are stalling as hard as they



‘Advance with light-touch regulation!’

Gordon Brown, British finance minister, 2006

‘Throughout the 19th century, when there was a *laissez-faire* mentality and insufficient regulation, you had one crisis after another.’

George Soros, financier

Belle Mellor

Record profits for banks

Country	Pre-tax profits, 2013, \$ billion
China	292.5
US	183.2
Japan	64.1
Canada	39.2
France	38.6
Australia	38.6
Brazil	26.1
UK	21.8
Russia	21.7
India	16.8
Total: top 1,000 banks	920.4

Source: *The Financial Times*, 14 June 2014.

can, which is pretty hard. Chances are that, by 2019, recapitalization will be nowhere near sufficient to make banks truly safe, so the public will remain exposed to the growing risk of another failure into the indefinite future.³

‘Regulations put in place so far would not suffice to prevent another collapse of the financial system,’ concludes one well-informed group of independent analysts.⁴ The causes of the 2008 financial crash remain largely unaltered. Big banks are still ‘too big to fail’. They have not been broken up, nor their retail (high-street) and investment (casino) functions separated completely. Banks are still gambling at their depositors’ expense.

‘The scale of misconduct in some financial institutions has risen to a level that has the potential to create systemic risks,’ laments Mark Carney, boss of the new Financial Stability Board (FSB), as well as the Bank of England.⁵

The FSB can observe the financial weather, but not change it. By the end of 2013 the world’s top 1,000 banks were back in business, making close to *\$1 trillion* (\$1,000 billion) in pre-tax profits; an all-time record, up 24 per cent on the year before.⁶

The historical record suggests that financial crises happen on average every 10-15 years, and that spiralling bank profits are a forewarning. So the next one is due any time soon. Yet, with interest rates close to zero, none of the current means of ‘recovery’ from financial crisis – lower interest rates, bailouts – is available.

Regulation has its limitations. Just as it

takes a criminal to catch one, so it takes a banker to regulate one – an inside job. Regulation is not an alternative to the criminal law on fraud and the like. It is arguable that taxes on financial transactions, or speculation, are simpler and more effective means to similar ends. Governments are by no means infallible. But they are, notionally at least, accountable to the public. Financial markets are accountable only to themselves.

There is, in neoliberal economic theory, no justifiable limit to the profits of banks. In any other economic theory there is no justification for banks to be more profitable than anything else, nor for bankers to pay themselves as they do. They have proved quite capable of destroying themselves, and much else besides. Deregulation, not regulation, destroys their profits. In an even halfway saner world, and in the interests of self-preservation if nothing else, bankers would surely be among the most avid of all advocates of regulation. ■

David Ransom

¹ Joseph Stiglitz, *Freefall*, Penguin, 2010. ² *The Guardian*, 24 October 2008. ³ Anat Admati & Martin Hellwig, *The Bankers’ New Clothes*, Princeton, 2013. ⁴ SOMO, Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations, *Preventing the Next Financial and Debt Crisis*, paper addressed to G20 finance ministers, Amsterdam, 12 June 2015. ⁵ Mark Carney, *Letter to G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors*, Financial Stability Board, 4 February 2015. ⁶ *The Financial Times*, 14 June 2014.

8

Organized labour is regressive

Unions have played a vital part in democracy, in the struggle against unemployment and injustice, and in international solidarity

Labour union members have always been subjected to more or less constant assault from the wealthy on the grounds that they interfere with free markets and therefore with the creation of wealth. In Britain, the *Daily Mail* hails a renewed round of legal restrictions on union ‘militants’ as ‘war on the trade unions’.¹ In the US, the National Right to Work Foundation suggests that labour unions indulge in ‘unreported campaign operations to elect and control congressional majorities dedicated to higher taxes and increased government spending’.²

But the idea that labour unions prevent the creation of wealth is simply wrong. If anything, the evidence from the rich Minority World shows the opposite to be true.

There are two related features of this evidence. First, at the heart of the Great Recession is what’s known as a ‘liquidity trap’ – crudely speaking, the stagnation of real wages since the 1980s.

The result has been a lack of ‘effective demand’ – the inability of most people to buy enough of the things that are being produced. That, in turn, has led to a reluctance to invest in producing any more things, and a glut of savings.

Second, inequality has spiralled, with astonishing accumulations of private wealth among a tiny band of individuals. This is bad for an economy as a whole, because the more wealth you have the less of it you need to spend, rather than accumulate, and the less there is for everyone else to spend. The ‘liquidity trap’ is opened wider. You create a society where the rich struggle to make productive – as opposed to profitable – use of their wealth, while the rest struggle just to get by from one day to the next.

These two features have been accompanied by three related trends. The first is a sharp decline in the density of labour unions – the proportion of all employees who are members. In ‘advanced economies’, this fell from over 45 per cent in 1980 to not much more than 30 per cent by 2010 (see graph). Since the main task of labour unions is to improve wages and conditions, it is reasonable to associate this decline with the stagnation of real wages.

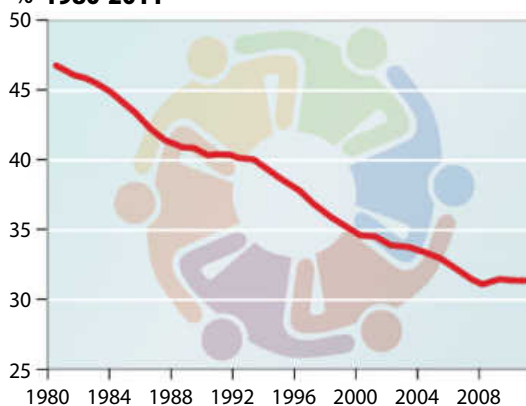
But, second, there’s more than just a reasonable association. Recent research by the International Monetary Fund has found that ‘the decline in unionization is related to the rise of top income shares and less redistribution, while the erosion of minimum wages is correlated with considerable increases in overall inequality.’³ So the ‘liquidity

trap’ is set, in large part, by the rise in inequality, the stagnation of real wages and the decline in organized labour that contribute to it.

Finally, the economic performance of ‘advanced economies’ – at least in the conventional terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per head of the population – has fallen in parallel with union membership. In the 1960s GDP grew much faster than in subsequent decades, when its decline has continued along a steady downward trend (see chart). The idea that by removing the regressive effect of labour unions you create more economic prosperity is patently false.

So, say what you like about labour unions, they don’t prevent the creation of wealth. With a lot more reason, you might say that they actually promote economic growth, if that’s what you’re after. But that’s not all that labour unions have ever been after. They have, historically, played a vital part in democracy, in the struggle against unemployment and injustice, and in international solidarity. Dispense with organized labour and you dispense with much of that as well.

Union density in advanced economies, % 1980-2011



Source: Florence Jaumotte and Carolina Osorio Buitron, *Inequality and Labour Market Institutions*, IMF, July 2015.

It may be that the decline of large factories, the rise of corporate globalization, the erosion of union rights and the relentless push for ‘flexible labour markets’ – as well, to be sure, as unions’ own shortcomings – have made it harder for them to organize effectively in wealthy countries. But none of that gives any more substance to the economic myth. ■

David Ransom

Declining average annual growth in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, high-income countries

Decade	%
1960s	4.3
1970s	2.8
1980s	2.2
1990s	1.8
2000s	1.2
[2010-14 – five years]	1.3]

Source: Calculations from World Bank GDP statistics.

¹ *The Daily Mail*, 27 May 2015. ² nrtw.org ³ Florence Jaumotte and Carolina Osorio Buitron, *Inequality and Labour Market Institutions*, IMF, July 2015, nin.tl/IMF-labour-inequality

9

Everyone has to pay their debts**I once met a man from an Indian village**

who had spent his entire childhood and youth as a slave because a landlord had to be paid back for a blanket given on credit to the man's father. The 'debt' still was not repaid when he was rescued in his middle years by a civil-society group.

This extreme example illustrates that debt is just as much about inequality as it is about lending and borrowing. Now here is another extreme. This year the share of the world's wealth held by the one per cent of top 'high net worth' individuals rose to 50 per cent. Meanwhile 71 per cent of the world's poorest people – all 3,386 million of them – could only lay claim to three per cent of total wealth.¹ Gives a whole new spin to living within your means.

On a global scale this concentration of wealth not only makes people and countries more dependent on debt, it also channels huge sums of money into completely unproductive and risky financial speculation – high risk, high return.² And it creates a tiny rentier class whose sole function is to extract yet more wealth from the rest of us through the instrument of debt.³

In such an extractive vision of the world the obscenity of odious debts of the past seems perfectly logical. From the 1970s on, Western banks flush with oil money encouraged some of the most corrupt regimes in the Majority World to take out huge loans. They had full knowledge that the dictators involved and their immediate circle would pocket the money and that the people of those countries would be chained to horrific debt service as a result – on a scale where the original loan was sometimes repaid many times over and which further ruined those countries' economies.

Such debts are described as 'odious' and the lenders should have been punished. Instead, for many indebted countries, the only relief came in the new millennium as a result of active campaigning for debt cancellation. Today there are signs that a new debt trap is being sprung on some of the most impoverished nations of the world.²

And while odious debts have been pursued with some vigour, rightwing Western governments are now refusing to incur legitimate debts their countries need following the financial crisis created by their elite friends.

Debt is talked up as the bogey to justify cuts in public investment and privatization sell-offs. But the opposite is needed to boost public confidence and get economies moving; we need debt-management rather than the constant

focus on reduction. Post-World War Two, many European nations ran large debts and invested in public provision in order to kick-start their economies, after which they could bring debt down to manageable levels again.

Foreign-owed debt can be dangerous if levels rise too high and the debtor country is economically weak, but the behaviour of the creditors must be held as much to account as that of the debtors. Greece today is the most prominent horror story of extractive debt. Greece borrowed too much in deals mired in corruption. Today the country's economy is broken, 'bailouts' have been channelled straight to the creditors rather than to help the Greek people, and the need of the hour – massive debt restructuring and the write-off of illegitimate debt – is not being addressed.

US economist Jeffrey Sachs describes the situation thus: 'Debt servicing is a shell game; give Greece tens of billions of euros every couple of years so that Greece can repay the debt that it owes. Professionals call this policy "pretend and extend". The problem is that the debt grows; the Greek banks die; and the Greek small and medium enterprises collapse. It is death by debt.'⁴ ■

Dinyar Godrej

¹ Credit Suisse, *Global Wealth Report 2015*, October 2015, nin.tl/global-wealth2015 ² Jubilee Debt Campaign, *The new debt trap*, July 2015, nin.tl/debt-trap ³ David Graeber, 'Can debt spark a revolution?', *The Nation*, 5 September 2012.

⁴ 'Death by debt – My response to the German Finance Ministry', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 31 July 2015, nin.tl/Sachs-debt

'There's no better way to justify relations founded on violence, to make such relations moral, than by reframing them in the language of debt – above all, because it immediately makes it seem that it's the victim who is doing something wrong.'

David Graeber, *Debt: The first 5,000 years*, 2012

10

Growth is the only way

Peering into the rubble of the great financial crash of 2008, economists, politicians, the media and the public have been looking for signs of recovery in terms of lasting growth. Not so much stability, mind, but growth – an expanding economy is a living economy, goes the logic, bringing its munificence as jobs and prosperity. Thus every flicker of growth is seized upon with hopeful optimism – ‘Are things finally on the mend?’

But here’s the thing – between 1900 and 2008 world population quadrupled and the economy more than kept up, with GDP per capita increasing sixfold. If one looks at GDP increase for the world as a whole (factoring in the population increase and adjusting for inflation), it has leapt up more than 25-fold.¹

The question that begs is whether the rising tide has lifted all boats. Apart from some success in the very basics, such as literacy and maternal-mortality rates, the picture remains familiar: rewards for the very few and stasis or worse for the vast majority.

After this century of growth, 925 million people do not have enough to eat, and just under half the world’s population lives in absolute poverty – despite more than enough created wealth to abolish such evils.² Yet traditional economists keep repeating the mantra of growth. Anne Krueger, who has worked for both the World Bank and the IMF, claims: ‘Poverty reduction is best achieved through making the cake bigger, not by trying to cut it up in a different way.’³ No surprise then, that economic growth hasn’t affected inequality.

Employment levels have fluctuated rather than grown steadily as one would expect. Indeed, new technologies that increase productivity lead to greater profits but fewer jobs rather than more.

The emphasis on GDP growth at all costs has led to wasteful resource use, particularly by the wealthier countries, on an unparalleled scale and without a backward glance.

It is often noted that the economy is a subset of the ecological system, but equally there seems to be a belief that nature can cope with anything we throw at it.

However, an assessment by the Global Footprint Network indicates we are running a dangerous ecological debt. Currently the global use of resources and amounts of waste generated per year would require one and a half planet Earths to be sustainable (see graph). The price to be paid for this overshoot is ecological crises (think forests, fisheries, freshwater and the climatic system), a price that is again paid disproportionately by the poor.³

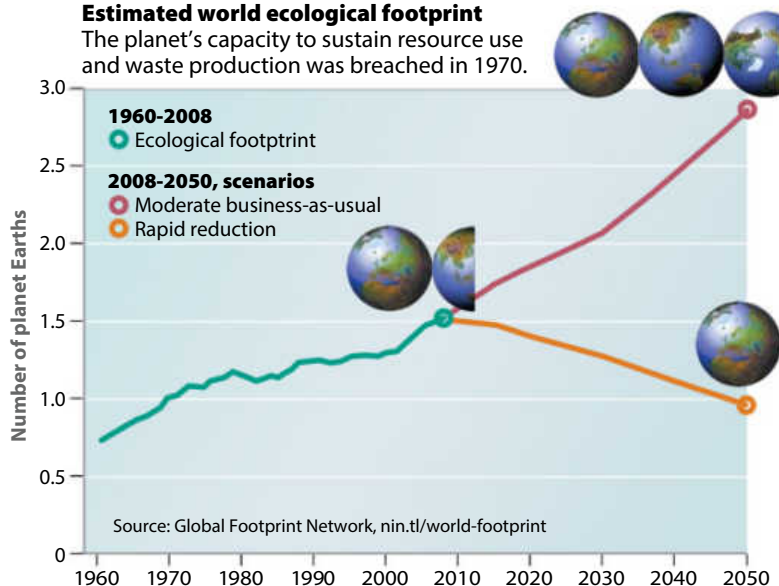
Moreover, as resources get more difficult to extract, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the fictions of unbounded growth that traditional economic thinking relies on.

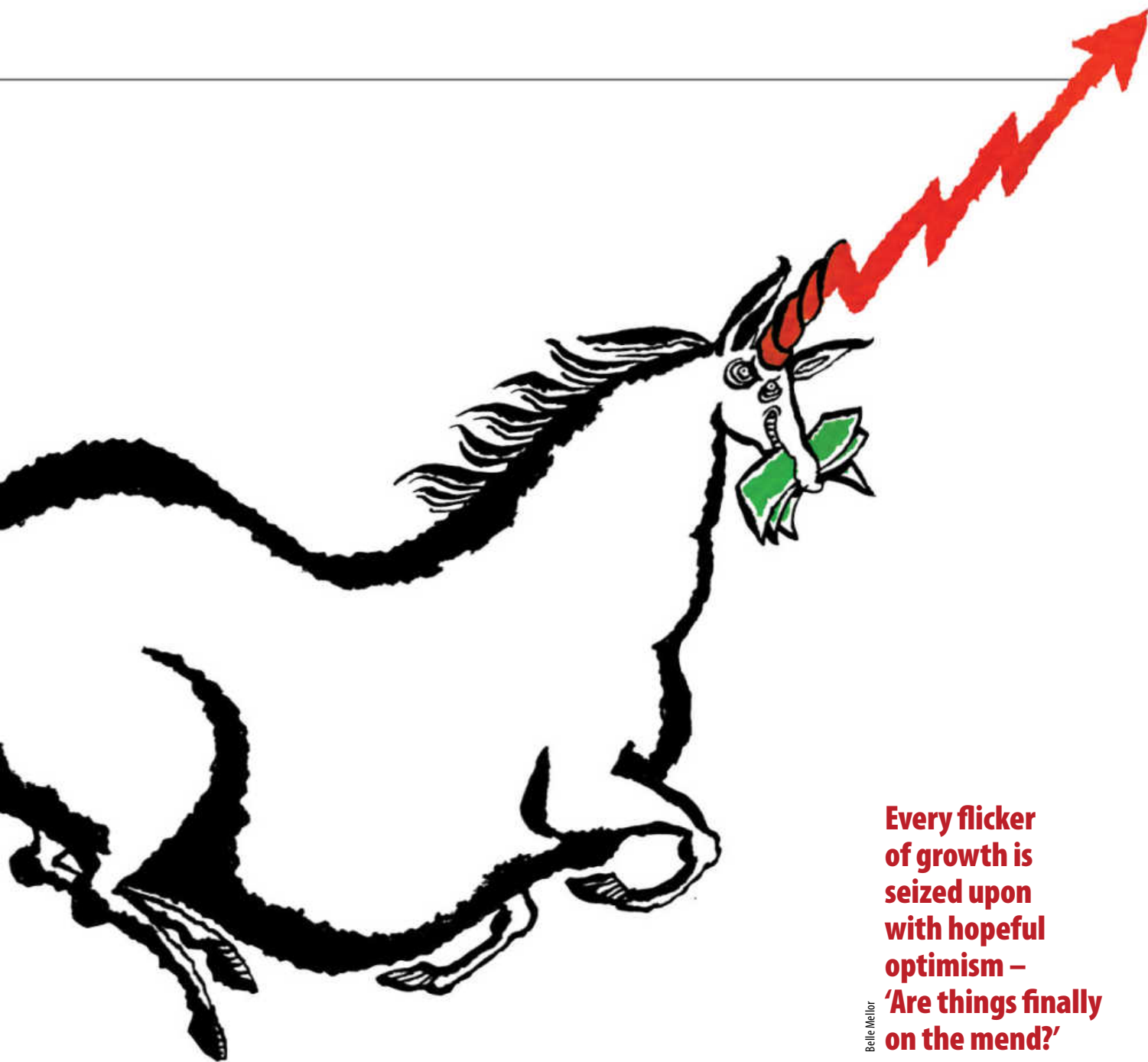
However, arguments to tackle our obsession with growth and work towards building a more sustainable economy often get derided as a desire to be mired in recession. But a steady-state economy is about meeting needs without environmental breakdown and brings benefits unknown to the proponents of consumer culture. The focus would be on greater equality, redistribution and quality of life – job shares and meaningful work, the value of leisure and human engagement, housing security rather than castles and tenements. Balance, in other words – an economy of having enough, where no resource is squandered and recycling is optimized.

This requires such a huge paradigm shift away from all we are led to believe is sound, that ecological economic thinking on how to achieve a steady-state economy remains woefully sidelined. In the wealthier nations we have a fear that reducing our mountains of things means we are losing the race, even if it’s a rat race. We acquiesce to a ridiculous level of housing insecurity because ‘that’s the way the market is’, even if it’s being played for all its

Estimated world ecological footprint

The planet’s capacity to sustain resource use and waste production was breached in 1970.





Every flicker of growth is seized upon with hopeful optimism – 'Are things finally on the mend?'

Belle Mellor

worth. And we cheer on debt-led consumer spending as evidence of that increasingly elusive growth.⁴

If the three-per-cent growth rate aspired to by many wealthy countries were achieved, their economies would double every 23 years – consuming in 23 years as much as all previous periods combined. Sustainable?

Yet questioning the pursuit of growth is viewed as death at the polls by politicians, with only a few brave Greens going there. So in the current climate, growth it is – like there's no tomorrow. ■

Dinyar Godrej

¹ Rob Dietz and Dan O'Neill, *Enough is Enough*, Earthscan, 2013. ² Figures for 2010, supplied by the UN, nin.tl/UNpoverty ³ Global Footprint Network, nin.tl/world-footprint ⁴ James S Meadway, 'The dangerous consequences of debt-led growth', *nef*, 9 April 2014, nin.tl/debt-growth

'Clinging to growth suffocates the imagination needed to devise more convivial ways to share a finite planet.'

Andrew Simms, British author and campaigner

'Real class warfare will result not from sharing, but from the greed of elites who promote growth because they capture nearly all the benefits from it, while "sharing" only the costs.'

Herman Daly, US ecological economist

North Korea

Many countries profiled in this space might be considered obscure. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea – DPRK or North Korea for short – has the opposite problem: it is notorious.

The weirdly wicked deeds (real or invented) of its young leader Kim Jong-un, who inherited power on the death of his father Kim Jong-il in 2011 – his father, Kim Il-sung, founded the state back in 1948 – are juicy tabloid fare. More books are published in English on the DPRK than on any other small impoverished state, be it scholarly and policy studies or the five defector memoirs from major publishers this year alone. A dozen Western tour firms will take you to the so-called 'hermit Kimdom' (where you'll be perfectly safe and eat quite well, unlike most of the citizens you won't see).

Cartoonish clichés hardly help. But nor does the counter-claim that the DPRK is demonized. A tyranny that regiments and starves its own people while brandishing nuclear weapons is not normal, nice or much misunderstood. North Korea is an outlier, a threat, a big raft of problems and a tragedy. None of this is fiction concocted by the many foes it has made.

The DPRK must be understood historically, not hysterically. An

ancient nation which tried to fend off outsiders, Korea had a brutal baptism into modernity: seized by Japan in 1905, then sundered in 1945 by US and Soviet liberators. That was meant to be temporary, but in 1948 separate regimes were declared. In 1950 Kim Il-sung invaded the South, and the Cold War turned hot. Four million died in three terrible years, but in the end the border barely moved.

After that trauma the two Koreas competed to develop, each aided by its allies. (DPRK boasts of *juche* – self-reliance – are an ingrate's lies.) Incredibly now, the North led at first with fast growth, industrialization and urbanization. But massive military spending and sclerotic state control soon hobbled this, while the South's export-led model saw growth soar. The UN estimates the North's GDP per capita at \$621 compared with the South's figure of \$26,482, 43 times higher. Korea today is one country, two planets.

An already tanking economy went into freefall after 1990, when Moscow pulled the aid plug. In the late 1990s famine took at least a million lives – five per cent of the population. A reluctant regime was forced to appeal for help, which came generously: the UN World Food Programme's DPRK operation was once its largest

anywhere. But donor fatigue and regime recalcitrance – going nuclear with three tests so far, punished by UN and other sanctions, hardly helps – have seen aid dwindle recently.

Famine changed the DPRK, but not enough. The collapse of state rationing forced people for sheer survival to create unofficial markets, which are now vital to the economy. The state no longer tries to stop these, but nor does it acknowledge them – much less help them. Rumours of far-reaching market reforms are hard to square with forcing urbanites to turn out for rice-transplanting as part of class struggle.

North Korea has always lived a lie, but now in new ways. A failed regime still demands total loyalty, on pain of a vile gulag: human rights abuses prompted a special UN Commission of Inquiry in 2014. Yet many citizens covertly watch South Korean soaps, so they know a better world exists. A few flee to the South but, lacking skills, often fare badly.

Wishful pundits, this writer included, long predicted North Korea's collapse – but it endures. Regime change appears remote – and its brandishing of nukes may spare North Korea the chaotic fate of Iraq, Syria or Libya. Change must come from within. ■

Aidan Foster-Carter

At a glance



Leader: Kim Jong-un: first secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea, first chair of the National Defence Commission and supreme commander of the Korean People's Army.

Economy: GDP per capita \$621 (South Korea \$26,482 – both UN estimates from 2013). **Monetary unit:** Won (KPW). Official rate 109 to US\$, black market rate 8,300. The Chinese yuan is widely used in markets. Foreign currencies are seen as a far safer bet than the KPW.

Main exports: Minerals such as coal and iron ore. Some 70% of trade is with China; the 24% with South Korea consists of light manufactured goods from the joint venture Kaesong Industrial Complex.

Population: 24.9 million. Annual population growth rate 1990-2013: 0.9%. People per square kilometre 207 (South Korea 517).

Health: Big early gains have been partly reversed by the famine and chronic

underfunding. Infant mortality worsened from 9 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 26 in 2008 though it improved slightly to 22 by 2013 (South Korea 3).

Environment: Northern Korea is largely mountainous and unsuitable for agricultural terracing that is prone to be washed away by storms. Much tree cover has been lost for firewood and charcoal; Kim Jong-un is keen on reforestation.

Religion: A few churches and Buddhist temples are kept for show. Real congregations exist underground, but the sole officially approved creed is quasi-worship of the Kim dynasty.

Language: Korean. Both Koreas are rare mono-ethnic states. The North abolished Chinese characters and uses only the Korean alphabet; it also purged many words of Chinese origin.

Human Development Index: Not available.





Top left: A view of the capital, Pyongyang, showing schoolchildren practising for the National Day parade in Kim Il-Sung Square, with the Juche Tower and a large new LCD screen in the distance. Top right: A woman from a rural workgroup just north of Pyongyang. Bottom right: Performing for foreign visitors in a rural kindergarten. Bottom left: A typical propaganda image – most North Koreans retain the sense that their leaders are admired abroad as well as at home. Photos by Christian Petersen-Clausen.

Star ratings Last profiled May 1997



INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★

Data are lacking, but the DPRK allocates resources on criteria including rank, loyalty and job. Alongside this hierarchy, the market-based inequality usual elsewhere is starting to emerge, with a *nouveau riche* class visible in Pyongyang (but hardly yet elsewhere). 1997 ★★★



LIFE EXPECTANCY ★★★

70 years (South Korea 82). A fall from 73 in the 1993 census is largely attributable to the 1990s famine. 1997 ★★★★★



POSITION OF WOMEN ★★

Age-old subordination of women based on Confucianism was outlawed in 1946. Yet the DPRK remains patriarchal, with few women in public life and traditional gender roles sanctified. Women are, however, key players in the new market economy. 1997 ★★



LITERACY ★★★★★

100% is claimed but unverified. Free compulsory 11-year schooling was attained by 1972, and expanded to 12 years in 2012. Its range is narrow: basic sciences, few humanities and much mythologizing of the Kims. 1997 ★★★



FREEDOM ★

North Korea comes near-bottom in international freedom listings and in September 2015 the World Bank ranked the DPRK last out of 230 countries on a range of criteria including press freedom and rule of law. 1997 ★



SEXUAL MINORITIES ★

The DPRK admits to neither homosexuality nor HIV. It is unabashedly racist and sexist, referring to Barack Obama as a 'wicked black monkey' and South Korean President Park Geun-hye as a 'prostitute' and 'comfort woman'.

NI assessment

POLITICS ★

The mask of monolithism hides fissures. Kim Jong-il's *songun* policy favoured the Army but Kim Jong-un is trying to claw back the Party's clout. Executions like that of his uncle and mentor Jang Song-thaek in 2013 might unnerve the elite and prove destabilizing.

A bizarre blend of traditional Confucianism, Japanese emperor-worship and Stalinism may be a dinosaur in the 21st century, yet it has survived two hereditary successions and by 2020 will have outlasted the USSR. When and how it might change is yet to be seen. 1997 ★

★★★★★ EXCELLENT
★★★★ GOOD
★★★ FAIR
★★ POOR
★ APPALLING

Cry me a river

An elegy for a wounded planet
and a plea for its protection,
by **SUPRABHA SESHAN.**

Illustrations by Jackie Morris.

*Author Suprabha Seshan writes:
'The words, thoughts and images in this piece
are traces left in my life by various river people,
including activists and ecologists. The voice
however, is singular: of a woman by the Kabini
River in southern India, listening to the news
and thinking of women along the Chalakudy
River fighting the Athirapally dam.'*

Sister, it is said that you can have a river and dam it too.

That the Ganga, the Yamuna, the Kaveri, the Narmada and the Krishna are our mothers, that small rivers like the Chalakudy (where you live) and the Kabini (where I live), are small mothers. That these rivers (our mothers), must be managed, for our collective prosperity.

There are 40 rivers in Kerala. And 60 large dams. It is said that these are beautiful places to picnic. That these are few dams for a densely populated state. It is said that the people need more power between 7am

and 11pm, and that areas suffering seasonal shortages in drinking water can be aided by storing the water in reservoirs, released from time to time, as the need arises. That this is the most practical way to distribute resources, between those who have (free flowing water, upstream), and those who have not (urban areas, downstream).

Sister, it is said that even if you block, divert and empty a river, there will be always be fresh water flowing through. It is said that some rivers in the country have surfeit water, and others a paucity, especially in the hot months preceding the monsoon. That this imbalance can be solved by linking up all our rivers, at zero cost to ecology and society. In fact, it is assumed that society is independent of ecology. That soon, perennial water will be



delivered to all homes and fields (even when glaciers have melted, aquifers run barren, forests fall to open-cast mines, and monsoon winds blow topsy-turvy). That this is enumerated and apportioned, and that we, the commoners (the fisherfolk, the tribal peoples, the farmers, and all the ordinary freshwater-dependent people, including the plant people and the animal people), can check the expert analyses. It is said that we can trust the authorities, that they understand our needs, as they do the rivers' capacities. That their analyses are consistent and all-encompassing, conducted for the greater common good, never ridden with contradictions, falsified information nor negligence, despite rebuttals by the most-affected communities, and independent expert committees.

* * *

Rivers are our life's blood, it is also said. They sustain hundreds of millions of people.

It is decreed that the people must ignore the consequences (short and long term) of emptied, diverted and dammed rivers, that we can trust that there'll always be water, for this is a blue planet, ever bearing, infinite, forgiving of any atrocities. It is said that people must ignore the clarion call of the Greens, those self-serving environmentalists hugging trees, ungrateful, complaining too much, doomsayers all. We must all learn to sacrifice more, and complain a little less.

It is said that billions of people worldwide need more electricity, that they don't need water or food from rivers; those items are now the governance of the honourable ministries (fetching rice from China, as mountains of grain rot in granaries).

It is henceforth decreed that mothers can be dammed, diverted, polluted and emptied, and powered down to power up their sons in big cities crunching into the wee hours of the morning on their cybermachines.

* * *

Rivers birthed civilizations, it is said. Civilizations destroyed rivers (it is omitted).

That they (the civilizations) collapsed when they drew down their water base (an inconvenient but negligible detail).

* * *

The submission to the Legislative Committee on 22 October 2008 by the Chalakudy River Protection Forum reads: 'The Kadar tribes have been consistently opposing the dam project all these years... The State Tribal Rehabilitation Commissioner had also made a site visit in January 2007 based on the complaint to the Honourable Minister for Forest and Wild Life from Geetha, an *anganwadi* teacher from Vazhachal settlement. The Tribal Rehabilitation Commission had also been convinced that Vazhachal is just 500 metres downstream of the proposed dam site. It concluded that the construction of the dam will have a social, economic and ecological effect on their habitat which must be "suitably addressed".' The report refers to the rich flora and fauna of the area and the valuable rights of the tribals which has to be assessed under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

It is said that the opposition by primitive tribal groups stands in the way of the needs of the civilized people and of progress, hence they are to be damned.

* * *

The word currency comes from the Middle English word *curraunt*, meaning circulation, flow. It is said that the currents in the economies are more valuable than the currents in the ecologies. All these flows (material and immaterial, invented and real), are interchangeable. It is said that cash flow is like river flow, that money equals currency equals flow equals ecology equals economy equals happiness equals food equals dynamic business deals, equals the construction industry equals upliftment of poverty.

It is said that the living world is an illusion, and the electrified world is real. It is said that the living world is needed to deliver us to





the pinnacle of prosperity exemplified by the machine world, and that this is our glorious destiny.

Rivers are not alive, it is said. They are, like factories and cars, systems that can be taken apart and put together. It is said that the world's economy needs the world's rivers, the world's oceans, the world's forests, and the world's people. That the world's economy is infinitely more important than the world's ecology, which is now measured at \$33 trillion (only). That the currents between bank accounts flow sweeter than the waters of a river, enabling our evolution as a species, by nourishing our bellies, our minds and hearts and ever-demanding bodies. Nearly all the rivers in the world have been dammed, what's your worry, are you not being supported by the economy?

Rivers are needed for progress, it is said. Communities along rivers can be sacrificed for modern culture. Historical and continuing injustices are irrelevant, it is said, for now there is progress. Resettlements, the disfigurement of ancient homes and biomes, and the shunting of land-based cultures into digital smart cities (unsmogged, unpolluted, uncrowded, uncriminal, unreliable on the earth) are necessary undertakings of India Shining*. For powering the virtual flow, delivering more goodness, happiness and wellbeing than the rivers could ever do if they were free flowing.

* * *

For a society accustomed to transplants, implants, plastic surgery, prosthetics, life support, dialysis, hormone therapies and radiation treatments, hooked to a few decades of hydro-electric power (and fossil fuels), the issue of why rivers should not be further dammed sounds a bit weak. After all, humans can fix any problem, we have the technology.

* * *

The same aforementioned 2008 submission quotes eminent ecological expert Dr Sathis Chandran Nair: 'Chalakudy River is perhaps the only major river in Kerala where along the main river channel, some stretches of the riparian vegetation remains in spite of so much destruction. One of these locations is along the river from below Poringalkuthu powerhouse to immediately above the Vazhachal waterfall. This is the most extensive riparian forest along the lower reaches of any river in Kerala. It is entirely within the submergible area of the Athirappilly Hydro-Electric Project. The most important aspect is that this riparian patch facing submergence has not even been subjected to exhaustive studies as to its role as a wildlife refuge, its species diversity, niche specificity, and role as an ecological corridor.'

* * *

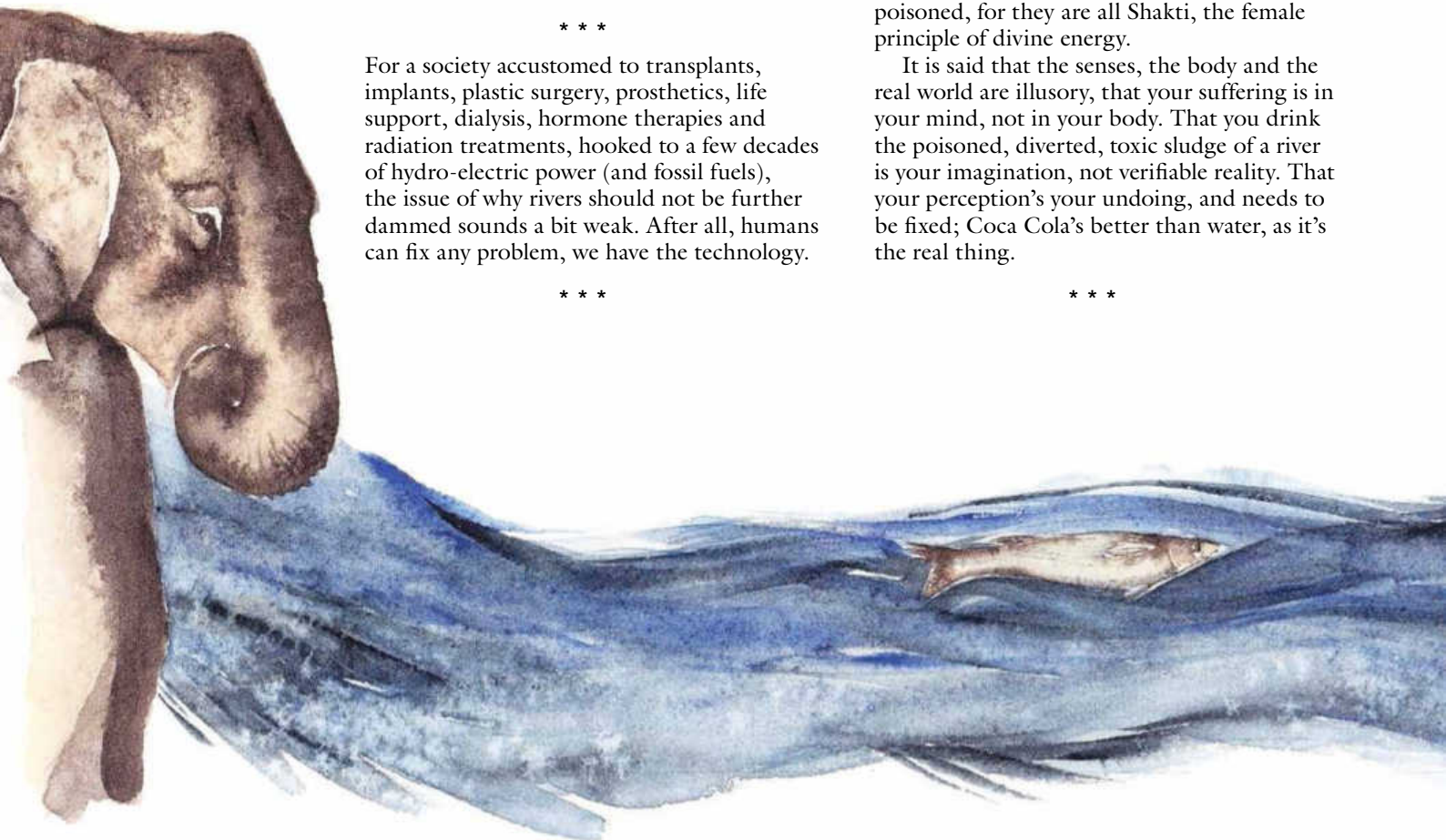
It is said that there is life after this planet.

It is said that you may not kill a cow, but you may dam a river. It is said that the goddess resides in the temple, and no longer in the living river. It is said that men did not trap the goddess indoors, that she came willingly.

It is said that goddesses (of rivers, forests, soils, and all things organic) are fecund, generous, never denying, ever demure and obedient, even when depleted, diverted, blocked, eviscerated, broken, burned and poisoned, for they are all Shakti, the female principle of divine energy.

It is said that the senses, the body and the real world are illusory, that your suffering is in your mind, not in your body. That you drink the poisoned, diverted, toxic sludge of a river is your imagination, not verifiable reality. That your perception's your undoing, and needs to be fixed; Coca Cola's better than water, as it's the real thing.

* * *



Waterfalls form along rivers. As do rapids, pools, sand banks, alluvial plains and plumes of mist. A river can start from a glacier, a lake, an underground spring, or seeping from the forest floor.

* * *

It is said that the Kerala economy needs more electricity, and that this electricity will come from dams, even if the existing dams are running at low capacity with poor efficiency, and even if elsewhere in the world dams are being taken down. It is said that the beautiful waterfalls in Athirapally and Vazhachal, comprising the seventh wonder of Kerala, attracting hundreds of thousands of people, are henceforth irrelevant. It is said that hornbills, elephants, amphibians, Kadar families (primitive and thus even more irrelevant), and the 104 species of fish (the greatest diversity of fish in any one river in Kerala) are all irrelevant.

Fish everywhere are now decreed to be officially irrelevant (90 per cent of the large fish in the oceans are gone). Freshwater fish are particularly irrelevant, like the ones in a small, still-not-fully-dammed 140-kilometre-long river, the Chalakudy. Irrelevant to the ecology of the plains downstream, and the creatures of the Arabian Sea. Coastal inhabitants are independent of the sediments borne by the Chalakudy River from the Anamalai mountains, borne down to the mighty sea-feeding fish; the coastline heaving with fish-loving people.

It is said that the mingling of the fresh with the salt water is not required, that the sea does not need this tiny river. That one more dam can surely not hurt a wounded and dying planet. Besides, look how many they are constructing in China, and in Brazil!

* * *

On 12 August 2015, the papers said, the 163-megawatt Athirappilly hydroelectric project, proposed across the Chalakudy River, received the go-ahead from the Expert Appraisal Committee for River Valley and Hydroelectric Projects. The panel observed that there were no endemic species specifically of the project area, that there were no species for which mitigation methods were not available. The damage due to submergence of flora and fauna of the area is mitigable, it said.

* * *

Sister, it is said that they can fix it, and that you and I must trust that they will fix it (as they will our bodies, the land and the winds; the waters, the biomes and the planet).

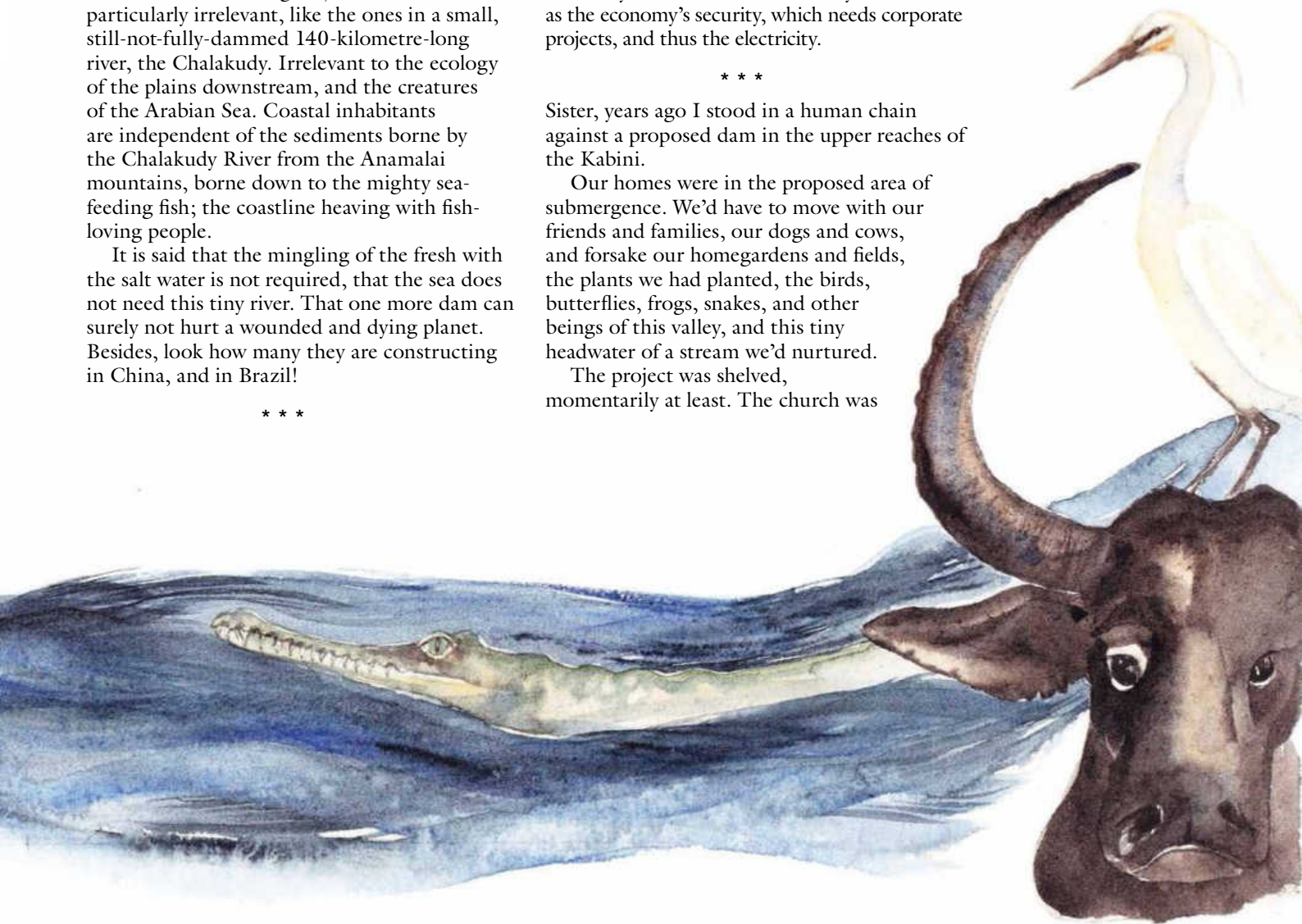
It is said (in the small print) that we must make a choice between electricity and fish. It is said that all damages to the river, the fish, the forests, the tribal people and the fragile ecologies of the coast waters are mitigable. It is said, in the finer print, that humans have become free of the planet; of nature. It is said that we can survive on electricity. It is said that our security is the same as the economy's security, which needs corporate projects, and thus the electricity.

* * *

Sister, years ago I stood in a human chain against a proposed dam in the upper reaches of the Kabini.

Our homes were in the proposed area of submergence. We'd have to move with our friends and families, our dogs and cows, and forsake our homegardens and fields, the plants we had planted, the birds, butterflies, frogs, snakes, and other beings of this valley, and this tiny headwater of a stream we'd nurtured.

The project was shelved, momentarily at least. The church was



active in this case, luckily. And very few of us were adivasis.

Sister, I'll never forget the feeling of impending displacement, of grief mixed savagely with rage at the thought of being forced to leave my home, for the sake of someone else's electricity.

* * *

Rivers are transport systems for trade, it is said.
Rivers are beautiful, it is said.
River-front property is costly, it is said.
Rivers attract millions of tourists, it is said.
You can't step into the same river twice, it is said.
Rivers make great metaphors, it is said.
Life is like a river, it is said.
Riverlike, we flow, it is said.
Rivers are the arteries of the planet, it is said.

* * *

A friend wrote upon hearing your story. 'And did you hear salmon and sturgeon are dying in the Columbia River because of the heat?' Another friend, now 84 years old, talked of the death of a glacier in Switzerland from which streams used to emerge, also dead now, from the heat.

* * *

I hear that you and your comrades, the brave people of Vazhachal, are unanimously fighting back, that you stand with your river, that you will sue the government.

Sister, I hear your cry from across the mountains: the further damming of this river is a violation of the inalienable rights of an ancient peoples and this ancient ecology; the two are entwined as blood and organs in one body.

* * *

The tale of the 25-year Athirapally resistance must be told everywhere.

Rest assured, on this tiny strand of irrefutable sanity, my sister, when the dams come down (by earthquakes, decay, hubris or our own decommissioning actions), when our beloved rivers flow unfettered once more, there will be fresh drinking water, fish, and fertile soil for children, the land, the trees and the animals, for all our descendant generations, and perhaps even for you and me.

You cannot dam a river and have it free.

Suprabha Seshan is an environmental educator based in Kerala, India.

*India Shining was a marketing slogan referring to the overall feeling of economic optimism in India in 2004.



OPEN WINDOW

Each month we showcase the work of a different cartoonist – in collaboration with cartoonmovement.com

THIS MONTH

Agim Sulaj from Albania/Italy with 'A Better Life'

The text with this cartoon runs: 'Europe faces an unprecedented influx of migrants, but fences will not stop people from looking for a better life.' **Agim Sulaj** spent the first 33 years of his life in Albania, where he worked with the political and satirical magazine *Hosteni* and developed his 'hyper-realistic' style. Following the demise of the Stalinist regime in Albania, Agim exhibited his work in 1993 to great acclaim in the Italian city of Rimini, where he has made his home ever since. He has since won many international prizes and recently exhibited his work in Paris and London.





#ShellNo: the triumph of the Kayaktivists

In April, on the cold waters outside of Seattle, a swarm of one-person boats – a flotilla of paddlers in bright yellow, blue, lime green and red vessels – surrounded a massive oil rig.

These were the Kayaktivists, some 500 people in all. The towering platform they targeted, known as the ‘Polar Pioneer’, belonged to Royal Dutch Shell.

The monstrous ship was set to sail to the Chukchi Sea, off Alaska, to search for oil. The company’s plan, environmentalists argued, both endangered pristine habitat and held dire consequences for a planet already reeling from global warming.

Shell had hoped to use Seattle’s port as a longer-term launching pad for its Arctic drilling. But after the reception by the kayakers, the company sulked: ‘If Seattle doesn’t want us,’ said Shell vice-president Ann Pickard, ‘I think we need to think about where this business goes.’

Weeks later, a fresh phalanx of kayakers in Portland – joined by activists who rappelled off a bridge to block the passage of Shell’s 115-metre icebreaker, the *MSV Fennica* – further complicated the company’s exploration plans in the north.

In the wake of the actions, we heard familiar criticisms: slowing down a few ships won’t do anything. These were just misguided stunts.

Moreover, naysayers claimed, since the oil giant had already invested upwards of \$7 billion, the wider #ShellNo campaign to stop Arctic drilling was doomed to failure.

That contention lasted until late September, when Shell suddenly

announced that it would ‘cease further exploration activity in offshore Alaska for the foreseeable future’.

Denying the impact of activists, the company cited economics: the results of exploration had been ‘disappointing’, its spokespeople said. Analysts pointed to the low price of oil.

Yet the company also blamed ‘the challenging and unpredictable federal regulatory environment in offshore Alaska’. This atmosphere, of course, had been made challenging and unpredictable precisely because of outraged citizens.

The *Houston Chronicle* reported, ‘activism, both on the ground and in the courts, slowed Shell’s Arctic campaign, sometimes sidelining it for years at a time, and hiked costs, as the company paid for rigs, staff and other assets that couldn’t always be deployed. Conservation groups and Alaska Natives led legal challenges to the 2008 government auction of Chukchi Sea drilling rights... prompting a judge to twice invalidate the sale and forcing the firm to delay work.’

Under pressure from greens, Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton expressed her opposition to Arctic drilling in August, casting a pall over Shell’s prospects of extracting whatever resources it might find.

The project became a pricier one than the company cared to shoulder.

In this context, Stuart Elliott, an analyst from energy information group Platts, told the BBC, ‘It is possible that Shell might almost be relieved as they can stop exploration

for a legitimate operational reason, rather than being seen to bow to environmental pressure.’

Greenpeace UK executive director John Sauven did not bother equivocating: ‘Big oil has sustained an unmitigated defeat,’ he said.

A few weeks later the Obama administration finally acquiesced to activist demands and effectively cancelled leases for Arctic drilling for the remainder of the president’s term.

Meanwhile, the Canadian *Globe and Mail* reported that, as a result of an international fossil fuel divestment campaign – which pundits again assured us would be utterly useless – ‘investors managing some \$2.6 trillion in assets have signalled their intention to shift focus away from fossil fuels’ and that ‘changing investor attitudes are starting to hit coal-related firms across the globe.’

This is what effective protest does. It alters public perception of what is acceptable. It hikes the costs of conducting immoral business. And it makes the political approval of wanton and destructive extraction less certain.

We do not always win. But sometimes those who are creative and daring – those who paddle hard and bring enough friends – prevail in spite of cynics and detractors.

Sometimes the Kayaktivists triumph. ■

Mark Engler’s new book *This Is An Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the Twenty-first Century* will be released in early 2016. He can be reached via the website DemocracyUprising.com

Carol

directed by **Todd Haynes** (118 minutes)

Nearly 30 films have been based on Patricia Highsmith's novels and short stories. **Carol**, the latest, stands apart. It originally appeared (pseudonymously as *The Price of Salt*) in a gaudy cover as lesbian porn for male readers. When, 30 years later, Highsmith had come out as its author, it sold over a million copies. Though it has a private investigator, and a scene with a handgun, it's not a tightly plotted crime thriller. Nor is it about a sociopath. Neither is it porn, though it does glancingly feature sex.

The 35-cent paperback carried the strapline 'The Novel of a Love Society Forbids' – which was especially so in the 1950s as Senator McCarthy campaigned against homosexual influence in the arts and politics. Maybe the strapline helped it find the audience it merited, who warmed to it and hailed it as a serious study of the prospects, for a lesbian couple, of a happy and fulfilling relationship.

Director Haynes, as in his *Far From Heaven*, sumptuously recreates the 1950s – its big bulbous cars, hairdos and fashions, and unreconstructed gender roles. Cate Blanchett as the socialite Carol is all fur, poise and appearance. She doesn't, though, sport a perm. Neither does Therese, the shop assistant Carol meets when she buys a Christmas present for her young daughter. And when Carol leaves her gloves behind, Therese gets in touch.



Carol – a groundbreaking story of lesbian love in McCarthy-era US.

Their relationship in some ways follows a classic filmic pattern – Carol is experienced and predatory, but softens and, as they get to know each other, falls in love. Therese is sweet, innocent, inexperienced. She's wowed that Carol knows her way around. And not least by Carol's courage in standing up to her husband, and for herself as a lesbian – at the risk of losing all contact with her daughter.

Carol is far from the familiar Highsmith territory of plot, calculation and murder. It's a simple but ground-breaking story of being true to oneself, and of finding oneself in commitment to – and trust in – others. Its ending is very simple too, extraordinary and very powerful.

★★★★ ML

FILM

Conscience and caring face exploitation in Bulgarian drama, *The Lesson*.



The Lesson (111 minutes)

written and directed by **Kristina Grozeva** and **Petar Valchanov**

Few Eastern European films get a wide release, but those we've seen in recent years have an entrapping sense of exploitation, social breakdown and isolation. **The Lesson** has a relentlessly building sense of dread, but enough drive, passing kindness and commitment to others to lift it above the universal miserabilism and hopelessness.

Nade is an English teacher in secondary school. She's caring, conscientious and in control. Her classes aren't a lot of fun, though at home she enjoys reading her daughter stories. She cares about the kids at school, she loves her daughter and clearly cares for her slacker, boozing husband, even when, instead of paying the mortgage, he buys parts for a camper van that he can't sell because he can't get it running.

There's no shortage of exploiters – the bank is dictatorial and punctilious, the company she has done translations for avoids paying her, a backstreet payday lender is a nasty, sleazy blackmailer. But Nade, to keep her home together, never gives up.

Told austere without music or embellishment, but with nicely changing pace and convincing twists, this middle-class drama packs a punch.

★★★★ ML

From Sacred to Secular – A Soul Awakening

by **Various artists** (*History of Soul Records SOUL021 8CDs + download*)

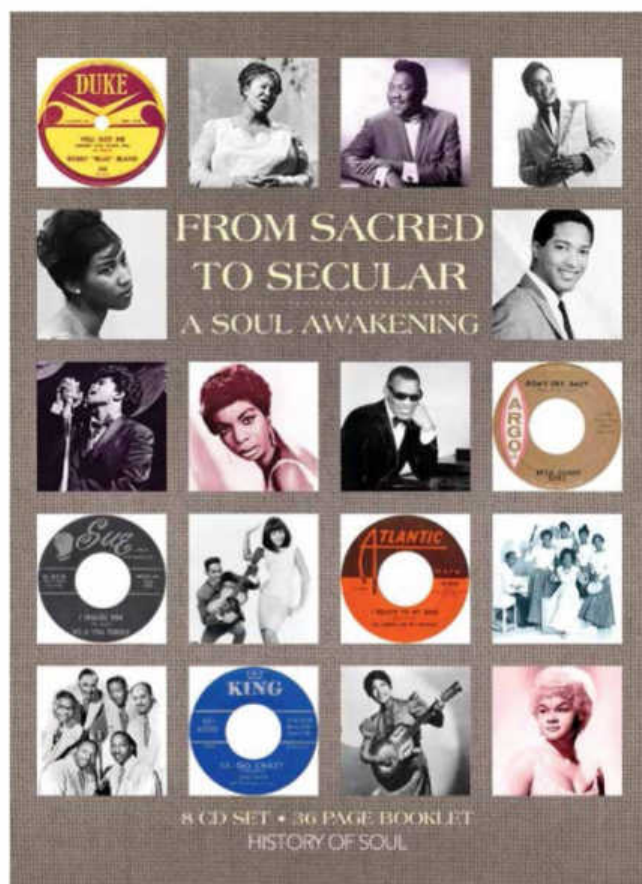
Mahalia Jackson, the Staples Singers, Marvin Gaye: these musicians – just some of the many contained on **From Sacred to Secular** – are trained in the American gospel tradition. They're able to conjure up the hope of heaven in a single phrase.

You hear some of this on the 200-plus tracks on eight-CD **The Sacred to the Secular** boxed set (each CD has about 28 songs), which takes its listeners from 1920s recordings of raw gospel roots to teasing out ties to jazz, R'n'B and soul and finishing in 1962. The links to political and social change are rightly made. The story is told with access to archives from labels such as Stax, Decca, Atlantic and a bit of Tamla Motown, although blues, and blues-orientated rock (for example, the Rolling Stones) are only hinted at in some sleeve notes that could do with greater length.

This omission is a bit of a clue: all the tracks are beyond the historical reach of copyright and, good as it is, this is a curatorial exercise focusing on what's easily available. (The set is actually made up of five double CDs previously released by History of Soul Records and three yet to come.) There are some great names here – in addition to those above, Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin and James Brown pop up – but there are no greatest hits to hear. Still, there's plenty to whet appetites. Go to it.

★★★ LG

historyofsoul.net



Impredicable

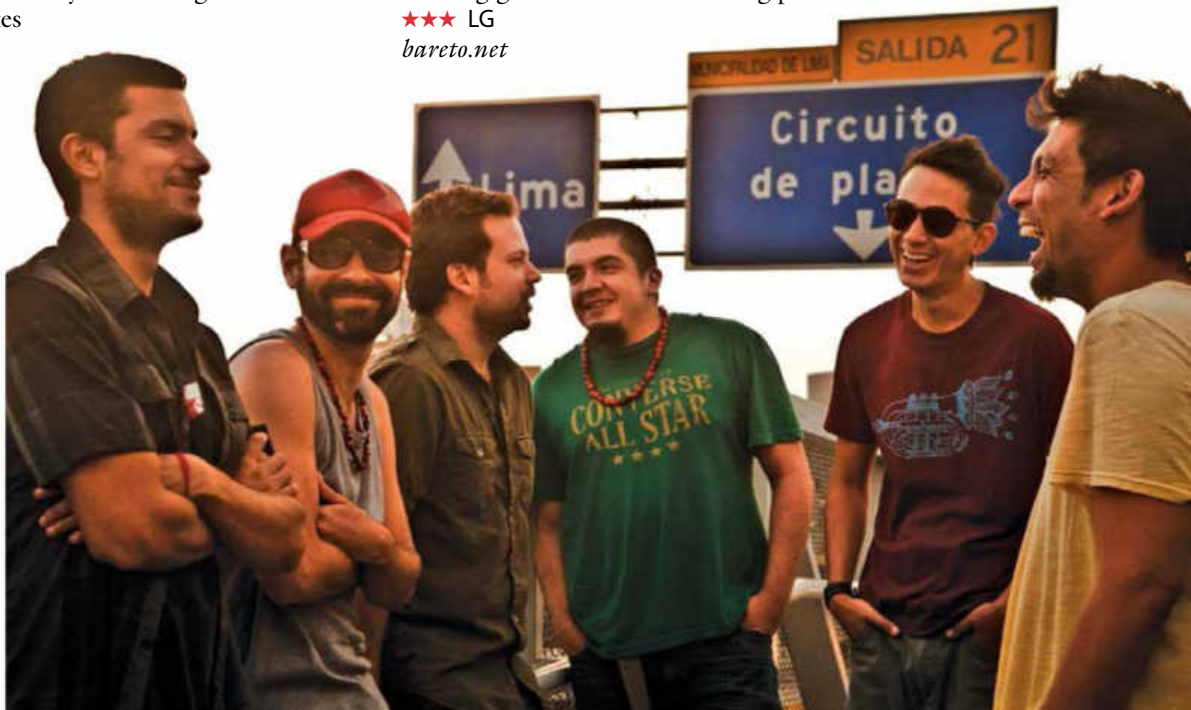
by **Bareto** (*World Village Records 091 CD, LP + download*)

Unpredictable – that's how the title of the fifth album from Peru's Bareto translates. On this evidence, **Impredicable** finds the band in a fertile cross-cultural groove, including, on 'El Loco', a guest visit from peerless vocalist and compatriot Susana Baca. In short, this is a far cry from the band's ska-heavy sounds of yesteryear, but it's just as fun and, arguably, that much more punchy. Cumbia, as a dance style and rhythm, has always been a big area of Latin American music. It navigates African roots and Spanish or Portuguese-language vocals; each country in the region has its own individual stylings. It's no surprise that an electronic, club-orientated techno-cumbia is out there. The one thing that makes cumbia so individual to groups and regions is its political expression: and here Bareto do not disappoint. The passive, mass culture engendered by television is in their sights on 'La Pantella' ('The Screen') and, given

the joyfully mashed-up cumbia styles on show, you can hear a call for individuality and creative expression. Even when Bareto are in palpably foreign territories – ska is the rhythmical shading to the lovely textures of 'Viejita Guarachera' – it is on their own terms. There's much to enjoy here: Baca's glorious tones make 'El Loco' utterly irresistible, but so too do the oceanic waves of synth lines, weaving guitar and sand-shuffling percussion.

★★★ LG

bareto.net



MUSIC

Nocilla Dream

by **Agustín Fernández Mallo**, translated from the Spanish by **Thomas Bunstead** (Fitzcarraldo Editions, ISBN 9781910695029)

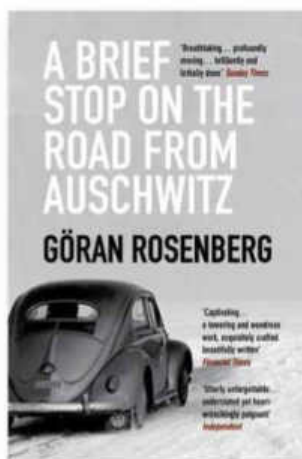
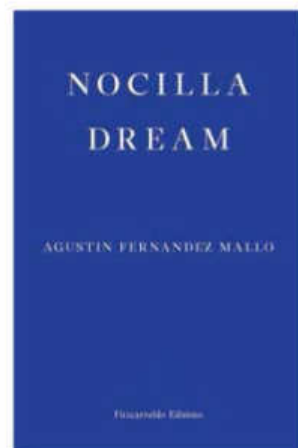
Reviewers are generally inured to the hyperbole of publishers, so, when the blurb to **Nocilla Dream** described it as ‘arborescently structured’, I sighed briefly and read on, only to find that the phrase is both literally and metaphorically accurate. Trees – specifically, one tree – are central to the book and the overlapping, incantatory narratives do resemble the form and spread of branches.

We begin in the middle of the Nevada desert, on US Route 50, which links Carson City and the township of Ely. On this desolate 400-kilometre stretch of road, a single poplar tree has managed to take root. Over time, and in answer to a bewildering variety of human needs, hundreds of pairs of shoes have been hung from this solitary tree. In a series of vignettes, packed with allusions to art and architecture, physics and the history of computing, the

author gives us the life stories of some of the people who have passed along the road. The lonely prostitute seeking love, the harried delivery driver, the damaged ex-serviceman hitching the route; whether fleeing from memories or in search of dreams, the characters here share a longing to wrest form and meaning from a chaotic and indifferent universe.

Both wildly inventive and formally structured, **Nocilla Dream** is a hugely entertaining road trip of a book that manages to wed impish humour to seriousness of purpose. Here are tales that will linger and lives that will matter long after the last page is read.

★★★★★ PW
fitzcarraldoeditions.com



A Brief Stop on the Road from Auschwitz

by **Göran Rosenberg**, translated from the Swedish by **Sarah Death** (Granta Books, ISBN 978783781300)

Göran Rosenberg’s memoir begins with a man stepping from a train in the Swedish town of Södertälje. It is 1947 and the author’s father, David Rosenberg, is 24 and a survivor of the Lodz ghetto, Auschwitz, and a succession of Nazi labour camps in the final months of the war. Although Södertälje was intended as a temporary stop on the way to resettlement in

the US or Israel, David is reunited with his wife, finds a job, and begins a family and an attempt at a new life in Sweden.

Drawing on his own childhood memories, Göran Rosenberg vividly sketches those early days of tentative optimism and rebuilding before delving back, as he must,

to trace his parents’ nightmare journey through the heart of darkness that was Nazi-occupied Europe. His account of how they survived while most of their family members perished is meticulous, dispassionate and deeply harrowing.

The section of the book that deals with the post-War years is equally affecting as the author gradually builds a picture of the grief and the torments with which his father had to wage a constant struggle. He leaves us in no doubt that the re-emergence of antisemitism and the desire of a weary world to move on and ‘forget’ contributed to his father’s ongoing suffering. This is a brave, luminous and, one hopes, cathartic memoir that urgently entreats us all to engage with ‘memory’s mobilization of its collective arsenal of witnesses, documents and relics to fortify, time and time again, the loosening ground beneath it’.

★★★★★ PW
grantabooks.com

Smart Citizens, Smarter State

by **Beth Simone Noveck** (Harvard University Press ISBN 9780674286054)

Over the past decade an explosion of data has revolutionized the world in ways that were previously unimaginable. In **Smarter Citizens, Smarter State**, Beth Simone Noveck argues that, by using technology to their advantage, citizens around the globe can now participate in the democratic process with far more authority and intellectual clout than they used to.

Traditionally, democratic accountability involved just casting a ballot once every four years, and then trusting government in the process of decision making. Noveck believes that technology has now bequeathed to us a noble civic duty to contribute to democracy on

an ongoing basis: using our skills to enhance transparency and openness of government.

Some readers may be turned off by Noveck’s jargon-filled academic approach. Those with the patience to read on will find much that is positive. There is, of course, a counter-argument: that technology is actually making the world more undemocratic and unequal. But Noveck doesn’t really go there.

Smarter Citizens, Smarter State is a valuable contribution to a debate that will continue as technology plays an increasing role in almost every aspect our lives.

★★★ JPO
hup.harvard.edu



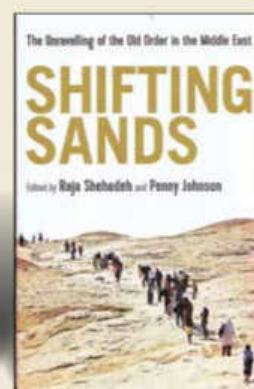
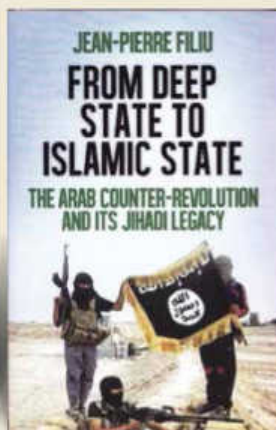
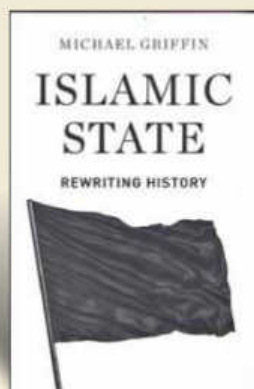
Also out there...

BOOKS – with a special focus on ISIS

Last year the group that calls itself Islamic State (and ISIS and ISIL) burst onto the international stage, apparently – or so it seemed at the time – out of nowhere. Thanks to the work of journalists and experts in the field, we now know that it has a far more complex and older provenance. And, understandably, publishers have been rushing to get out books that explain the phenomenon of this well-funded and über-violent eruption of militant Islam.

As a specialist on the Taliban and al-Qaeda, Michael Griffin is well placed to put IS in context with his recently published **Islamic State – Rewriting History** (Pluto Press, 9780745886510). Griffin takes a long view, tracking the beginnings of IS (or ISIL) in Iraq, its involvement in the Arab Spring and current impact on Syria. He also looks at the role played by regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Iraq and the way they have contributed to IS's success by supplying arms and funding.

From Deep State to Islamic State (Hurst, 9781849045469) by French academic Jean-Pierre Filiu analyses the autocracies of the Middle East which, he argues, crushed the Arab Spring by turning loose their intelligence and security agencies and the mafia-like gangs



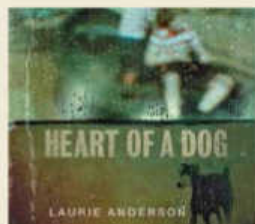
of the 'Deep State'. He points the finger at regimes that secretly armed Islamic terrorists in the hope of convincing Western states to back their dictatorships. (This book is strongly recommended by Daniel Adamson, who edited the *New Internationalist's* September issue on Syria.)

ISIS – The new global war on terror (9781780263120) by US activist and journalist Phyllis Bennis is a useful primer whose UK edition will be published in *New Internationalist's* *NoNonsense* series in early 2016. Written in a highly accessible FAQ format, this one is eminently suitable for the general reader and students alike.

For an inside view of IS, go to Beirut-based journalist and historian Sami Moubayed's **Under the Black Flag** (IB Tauris, 9781784533083). Moubayed has been writing about Syria for 20 years and his account reveals exceptional access.

Meanwhile, a broad regional view with diverse voices is on offer in **Shifting Sands – the Unravelling of the Old Order in the Middle East** (Profile Books, 978 1781255223). Editors Raja Shehadeh and Penny Johnson bring together 15 writers to discuss how current issues connect with the past, especially the history of colonialism and the interplay between religion and politics.

MUSIC *Heart of a Dog* (Nonesuch) is the title both of a standalone soundtrack and Laurie Anderson's brilliant and moving film, exploring her relationship with death. Really. Framed as the story of the life and death of Lolabelle, the lovely rat terrier that Anderson shared with her husband, the late Lou Reed, the work is a stunning meditation, seen through a Buddhist lens, on joy, death and the survival of love. See the film, hear the soundtrack – they are superb.



Racines ('Roots') (Blue Wrasse) is an old-school skank from the Côte d'Ivoire-born **Tiken Jah Fakoly** (pictured right). The righteousness of a Bob Marley-era reggae and a lineage that binds Africa and its worldwide diaspora, come together on *Racine's* 11 covers of originals by Marley, Peter Tosh, Burning Spear and others. Recorded at the legendary Tuff Gong Studios in Kingston, reggae greats U-Roy and Max Romeo are among Fakoly's guests. It's hard to argue against this album's persuasive power.



FILM *Sunset Song*, as with Terence Davies's other films, has a strong sense of a community and a way of life, and, not least, the strength of women and indulgences of men. Agyness Deyn is superb as a young woman running a Scottish farm, but the roles of the two significant men in her life are clichéd and underwritten.

Sanna Lenken's debut drama **My Skinny Sister** is good on the relationship between two teenage sisters, and the torn loyalties of the younger, who reveres her older ice-skating sister with an eating disorder.

Chad Gracia's **The Russian Woodpecker** is a wild and weird doc about Soviet bureaucracy, a conspiracy connecting the Chernobyl nuclear explosion to a massively expensive nearby Soviet spy station, and the Ukraine today. Humour, great photography – but worrying, too.

Where it's all going isn't clear, but Saeed Taji Farouky's poignant doc **Tell Spring Not to Come This Year** gives the viewpoints of soldiers of an Afghan National Army corps following the withdrawal of NATO. They lack personnel, ammunition, pay, and confidence in politicians and officers so distant from the fear and fatalities. But they are rich in courage and comradeship.

REVIEWS EDITOR: **Vanessa Baird** email: vanessab@newint.org

Reviewers: Louise Gray, Malcolm Lewis, JP O'Malley, Peter Whittaker.

STAR RATING

★★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★★ VERY GOOD ★★★ GOOD ★★ FAIR ★ POOR

Southern Exposure

Highlighting the work of artists
and photographers from the
Majority World



**KEROSENE
FOR
WHOLESALE & RETAIL**

In the slums of Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya, a resident waits for customers to pass his kerosene store on the edge of a road expansion project. He may well have had a long wait; at the time the photo was taken (May 2013) the road was in desperate need of repair. The building of the bypass road through Kibera was intended to benefit residents and local businesses, but it has not been without controversy. Some residents lost their homes to make way for the new road.

Karel Prinsloo / Africa Media Online



In the eye of a Twitter storm

Since having a child, I've given up on a real social life

and settled for a social-media life instead. I've gone from laughing in pubs and gossiping over coffee with people I know and like, to arguing via computer with people I don't know and don't like. Sadly, for a delicate flower like me, my new social circle clearly doesn't like me one little bit.

I take full responsibility, however, for my recent journey to the online sewer, which was the unfortunate result of a bad mood, an exquisitely unpleasant radio DJ and access to a smartphone. This heady mix was enough to propel me, unarmed and unprepared, into the centre of a frenzied Twitter war with a professional Troll, the debris from which is still echoing around cyberspace.

To get you up to speed, here, in a Twitter-sized 140-character nutshell, is what happened:

Pompous bully viciously attacks frail, elderly black civil rights campaigner on radio & tries 2 make fool of him. I go crazy #fallsintotrap

Stupidly, I took the bait like a lion from a dentist and walked blindly into an ambush. Trouble was, I'd barely engaged with any of the actual content of the histrionic diatribe the host had been spouting and, instead of making a proper argument, just felt a visceral need to tell him and the rest of the internet what a monumental dickhead he was. This I did, and, if I'm honest, I probably went a bit over the top. But not nearly as over the top as the bigoted self-publicist himself, who expertly escalated my admittedly fairly childish remonstrance, spinning it into social-media

gold like a bloated, rightwing Rumpelstiltskin.

He began our exchange with a direct threat (it was not clear if it was legal or physical) before going on to post my picture and work details, all punctuated by a consistent torrent of high-octane bile.

Next, he encouraged his army of haters to join in the fun and games. In fairness, many of their comments were fairly amusing, like the one suggesting I become a Mick Hucknall tribute act (see picture above). I was also struck by how people so obsessed with being English can have such a grunting grasp of the language.

Very quickly I realized I'd been an idiot for getting involved in the first place. I decided I was giving the shock jock exactly what he wanted and I was best off not responding. But it soon became apparent that not responding was in itself provocation enough for the bargain-bin Lord Haw-Haw, who attempted to reignite the row by announcing I was 'a talentless old soak' who had 'run off crying to mummy'.

Even now, weeks later, I still regularly get people commenting on or retweeting posts about me 'being a waste of organs', looking like Ronald McDonald or being a Muppet, and if I'm honest I find it quite entertaining. It was, after all, my fault for engaging with the porcine provocateur to begin with. I shouldn't have descended to his level, I know. But honestly, he was being such a gigantic arse! ■

Steve Parry is a comedy writer, performer and political activist. He is Welsh and lives in north London. You can contact him on Twitter: @stevejparry





Enrique Peña Nieto

Job: President of Mexico

Reputation: Telegenic celebrity politician with serious credibility issues

'It would be unforgivable if El Chapo escapes again,' Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto announced back in February 2014 when resisting calls for the notorious drug baron's extradition to the US. By the end of July the following year, Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán had slipped into a sophisticated mile-long purpose-built tunnel and escaped from Mexico's most secure penitentiary. Ever since December 2012, when Nieto restored to power the kleptocratic Party of Institutional Revolution (PRI), things have gone this way: sweeping promises with meagre results.

Mexicans had already had 71 years to get to know the corruption and systemic human rights abuses that always accompany PRI rule. But amid cries of voter fraud, 38 per cent of the electorate supposedly cast their ballots for Nieto – the new pretty-boy face from an old PRI family in central Mexico. Nieto's programme was the usual boilerplate neoliberalism, promising security for foreign investors and privatized prosperity from which all would benefit. Fatigue with former President Felipe Calderón's prosecution of the US-funded 'war on drugs' was certainly a factor – some 60,000 Mexicans died on his watch in the futile effort to keep drugs from crossing the border. 'Poor Mexico,' lamented Porfirio Díaz, Mexican president back in the 19th century, 'so far from God and so close to the United States.' Perhaps PRI voters had a certain nostalgia for the *Pax Mafiosa* that had accompanied previous PRI governments – make a deal with organized crime and maybe they won't kill so many of us.

But times have changed, and both the structure of crime gangs and the nature of state power have splintered, with various business factions – both legal and illegal – taking control of different parts of the Mexican state, particularly the judiciary and the security forces. So, despite attempted manipulation of murder-rate statistics, drug-related violence has not decreased. In fact, the number



Dennis Brack/Pool/ABACAPRESS.COM

President Nieto: Mexico's most unpopular president since records began.

of disappearances and politically motivated murders has shot up. It is estimated that 98.3 per cent of crime goes unpunished.

The focal point of protest against Nieto's regime has been the mishandling of the mass kidnapping (and presumed murder) of 43 young activist students from a teachers' college in Iguala. Nieto and his government first downplayed the event (pesky troublemakers, after all) but outraged families, huge demonstrations and growing international condemnation kept the heat on. An unlikely official investigation blamed corrupt local police and drug dealers and threw a couple of local municipal officials under the bus, but an international panel appointed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights found the official version not credible. This has left Mexicans wondering how far up the ladder murderous responsibility lies and whether the military (which has a

base close to the kidnapping site) is directly involved.

Kidnapping has become a national sport in Mexico, with tens of thousands taken every year. Commercial motives usually lie behind it, but an increasing number of activists and critical journalists are also being disappeared or murdered outright. By whom? Finding out seems to be a low priority for Nieto's government. Since the days when he was a state governor, Nieto has been connected to political repression, most notably against the activist town of San Salvador Atenco in 2006, when police used killing and rape in a violent but unsuccessful attempt to break a highway blockade – a favourite Mexican protest tactic.

Nieto is now the most unpopular president in the history of Mexican polling. It's not all his fault, though, as the plummeting price of oil on which Mexico depends has soured economic fortunes. Governing and reforming Mexico, with its gross inequalities and violent political culture, will never be an easy task, no matter who is president. But real change will likely come from below, where a stubborn social-justice movement has earned its spurs in the face of endemic corruption and murderous repression. ■

LOW CUNNING:

Nieto gets by as a kind of fairy-tale prince celebrity married to glamorous *telenovella* actress Angelica Rivera. But will the show be renewed for next season?

SENSE OF HUMOUR:

Nieto didn't know the price of the lowly tortilla (a staple diet for poor Mexicans) because, after all, 'I am not the lady of the household'.



Sources: Al Jazeera America; Council on Hemispheric Affairs (coha.org); upsidedownworld.org; Wikipedia; nacla.org; the Guardian.

Puzzle Page by Axe

The crossword prize is a voucher for our online shop to the equivalent of \$30. Only the winner will be notified. Send your entries by 23 December to: New Internationalist Puzzle Page, The Old Music Hall, 106-108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JE, UK; fax to +44 1865 403346; or email a scan to: puzzlepage@newint.org
Winner for Crossword 205: Tony Glasbey, Doncaster, England.

Crossword 207

CRYPTIC Across

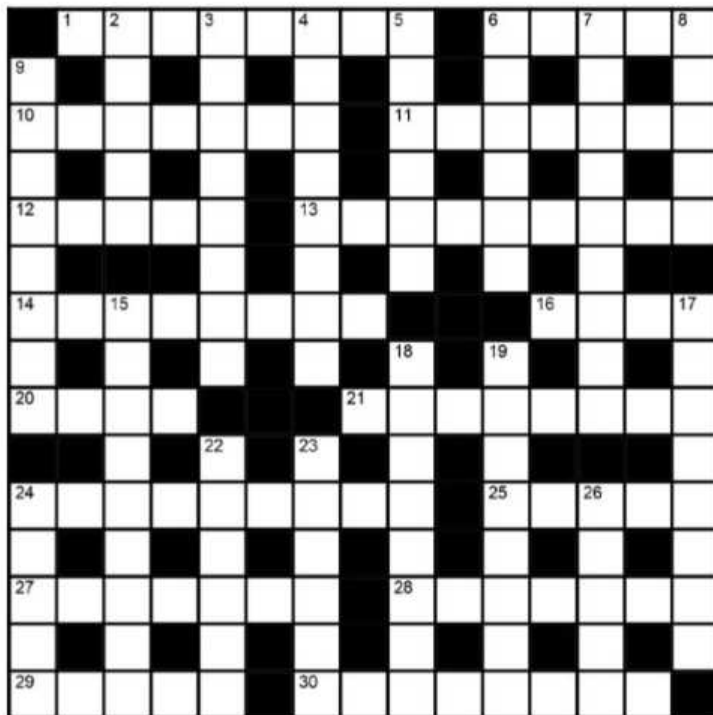
- 1 Manual used to get round a volcano (5,3)
- 6 Area of Scotland which imbues Caledonian gusto (5)
- 10 Hurt but toughened with Juliet's involvement (7)
- 11 UK aides deployed in the Basque Country (7)
- 12 Composer acceptable to use in British church (5)
- 13 Overgarment explorer needed to make a point in Antarctica (4,5)
- 14 Gold and a new yacht ensnared king into unlimited rule (8)
- 16 Indian city where Greeks met, but failed to get round (4)
- 20 Firm way of doing things in Italian town (4)
- 21 Georgia river grassland's hard to follow (8)
- 24 After quiet beer many hit the town in Indonesia (9)
- 25 Reagan gets familiar after a short period with dope (5)
- 27 Place in Spain to take Nan and another woman (7)
- 28 First class comeback after *The Godfather* and *The Fairy Queen*? (7)
- 29 Here ancients believed was the top of the world, not south – you will see in the end (5)
- 30 Malaysian port with a beach, for example, and a loo, it's said (8)

CRYPTIC Down

- 2 French region Roman journals pick out (5)
- 3 No right at the time to take the queen: need of quarter to be given (8)
- 4 The cloud broke when he negotiated in Vietnam (2,3)
- 5 Nearly half of 24's involved on the river in Syrian city (6)
- 6 Like the matching elements in an Italian city (6)
- 7 Where in Wales to see some 70s rock on the keyboard (9)
- 8 Leicestershire river bird (5)
- 9 Plonk in a white van is reported? (3,5)
- 15 Main adult diversion in this part of India (5,4)
- 17 Attic, where to find a further Scot (8)
- 18 Poignant setting in Devon? (8)
- 19 Split area into Salvador's dull interior and sea, ultimately (8)
- 22 Skewer antelope, cutting acceleration by a quarter (6)
- 23 Guy, an American with a place up the Amazon (6)
- 24 Sound part of the Pacific Rim? (5)
- 26 Welsh valley loses HD sporadically – not needed here, near 27 (5)

QUICK Across

- 1 World's second highest active volcano (4,169 m), on Hawaii (5,3)
- 6 Scottish administrative region, head town Forfar (5)
- 10 Offended (7)
- 11 Basque homeland (7)
- 12 Max ----- (1838-1920), German composer famed for a popular Violin Concerto (5)
- 13 Headlands sharing the same name in Antarctica and Vancouver I (4,5)
- 14 Absolute power (8)
- 16 Old Mogul capital on the Yamuna R (4)
- 20 One of the Italian Lakes (4)
- 21 Port of Georgia, USA (8)
- 24 Capital of S Sumatra province, Indonesia (9)
- 25 Imbecile (5)
- 27 Former Moorish capital in Andalusia (7)
- 28 Queen to Oberon in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (7)
- 29 N Atlantic region believed by ancient geographers to be the northernmost land in the inhabited world (5)
- 30 Port of Sabah, Malaysia (8)



QUICK Down

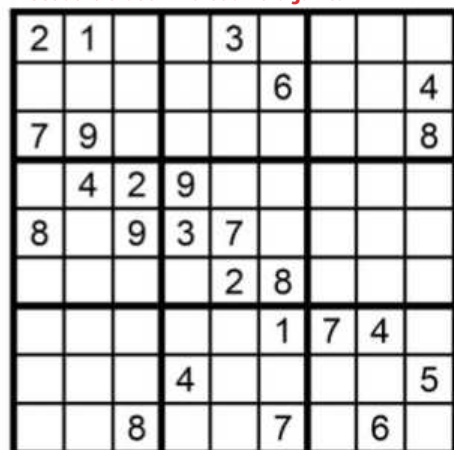
- 2 Ex-French countship on the Loire (5)
- 3 Boreal (8)
- 4 Vietnamese diplomat (1911-1990) who negotiated with Henry Kissinger to end the war in Vietnam (2,3,3)
- 5 Second city of Syria (6)
- 6 Umbrian home of the founder of the Greyfriars (6)
- 7 Former Welsh county, major cities Cardiff and Swansea (9)
- 8 Tributary of the (Stratford) Avon from its source in Leicestershire (5)
- 9 White wine, often humble and non-varietal in description (3,5)
- 15 Indian State, capital Chennai (5,4)
- 17 Greek of ancient Attica (8)
- 18 Popular seaside resort on Devon's Torbay (8)
- 19 Coastal region of Croatia (8)
- 22 Transfix (6)
- 23 Amazon river port, a host city in the 2014 football World Cup (6)
- 24 ----- Sound, natural inlet upon which sits Seattle (5)
- 26 Andalusian hill town, on the R Guadalevin gorge (5)

LAST MONTH'S SOLUTION

Across: 1 Potomac, 5 Hit back, 10 Cali, 11 Isle of Jura, 12 Malaga, 13 Brahmani, 14 Badon Hill, 16 Dubai, 17 Kopek, 19 Pais Vasco, 23 Mannheim, 24 Acadia, 26 Parisienne, 27 Oder, 28 Mayenne, 29 Geelong.
Down: 2 Odawara, 3 Oujja, 4 Aligarh, 6 Isobar, 7 Bujumbura, 8 Corunna, 9 Global warming, 15 Oceanside, 18 Okayama, 20 Siamese, 21 Crimean, 22 Median, 25 Atoll.

Sudoku 53

The Sudoku that thinks it's a word game!



Now, using the key below, substitute letters for the numbers in the east-central block...

1=Y; 2=F; 3=N; 4=A; 5=T; 6=E; 7=O; 8=R; 9=W

...and make as many words as you can of five letters or more from the nine letters in the keywords, the extra clue to which is: 'Road north bent around place in Indiana' (4,5). You cannot use the same letter more than once, nor use proper nouns (excepting the keyword), slang, offensive words, abbreviations, participles or simple plurals (adding an 's' or 'es').

GOOD 30 words of at least five letters, including 4 of six letters or more

VERY GOOD 35 words of at least five letters, including 6 of six letters or more.

EXCELLENT 40 words of at least five letters, including 8 words of six letters or more.

Last month's **Sudoku keywords**: 'Isle of Man'.

Solution to Wordsearch 52: The 20 Commonwealth countries were: Bahamas, Bangladesh, Belize, Botswana, Canada, Gambia, Ghana, Guyana, India, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Maldives, Malta, Nigeria, Samoa, Swaziland, Tonga, Uganda, Zambia.

Wordsearch 53

Find the 19 Popes hidden here.



Ramin Bahrani

The US-Iranian director and screenwriter talks to **MALCOLM LEWIS** about telling stories, challenging the global system, and new film *99 Homes*.

What inspires your films?

Curiosity, finding out about worlds I don't know, and asking: 'How do we, how should we, live?'

You're an unusual US filmmaker – you make films about work.

Yes, I do. About the life you have if you're a pushcart vendor on the street, or a kid working in a chop shop, dismantling old cars, or, as in *99 Homes*, in real estate, foreclosing on people's homes.

And about surviving on the edge – a Pakistani or a Latino kid in New York; a Senegalese taxi driver in Carolina; an unemployed carpenter in Florida.

In American films, people are cops, celebrities of some kind, superheroes...

You don't have a Hollywood way of seeing things. Your parents are Iranian – does that influence you?

I suppose I have two ways of seeing things – the American and the Iranian. I spoke Iranian first. My dad used to talk about growing up in a far-flung southern village without electricity. My parents were both passionate about Iranian poetry and history. Many of the US writers and filmmakers I admire were immigrants or the children or grandchildren of immigrants – John Steinbeck, Arthur Miller, Billy Wilder, Martin Scorsese. Who else but Scorsese could have made *The Godfather*? He grew up with it, he understood that kind of a family, life in the kitchen, weddings.

So what would you say your films are about?

I was hoping you would tell me! What do you see?



I see empathy, understanding – of new arrivals, outsiders. We really get inside their lives. Though in *99 Homes*, there's a shift. That fast-paced opening 30 minutes, lots happening...

The brutality of the system. One hit after another.

It's aggressive capitalism, and it's overt, whereas in your earlier films it was behind the scenes. *99 Homes* overtly, and unusually, attacks the US system.

Yes, but it's not just American. I won't say global, but it is pretty much, and is certainly in the US and in Europe, as happened with the Libor manipulation. If you or I stole a dollar candy bar we'd go to jail. But, if we work within the system that steals billions of dollars, we'll be fine, and we'll ultimately be rewarded. And no-one goes to jail.

No-one's gone to jail in Greece...

And the [US] housing crash in 2008 was the same. Only a few people at a lower level get jailed. That's why *99 Homes* has been striking a chord wherever it's been shown – Greece, Italy, Spain, France. The housing world is specific, like the worlds in *Chop Shop* and *Man Push Cart*, and audiences like discovering that, going into a world they don't know. But there's a universal, too – the sense that, for the 99 per cent, wherever you go, the system is rigged. People are feeling that everywhere.

And there are characters in *99 Homes* that they can identify with.

Even Rick Carver, the character played by Michael Shannon. He is 'the devil', but you empathize with him. The system is the real villain. He's a servant of it and smart enough to see that it's rigged and how he can survive and profit from it. He's hard to argue with – the system works with him.

And you sense anyone could become like him.

Yes. If you said to someone: 'Could you evict people from their homes?', they'd say they'd never do that! But you see the film, and you realize you could end up in that situation. Society makes it that way. Real-estate brokers signed up to buy and sell properties. Evictions became their job. And so they've ended up carrying guns.

The film ends with a shot of a teenager – the coming generation. Can we, the people, change the world?

The world always changes. We will, I believe, cure cancer. But we have extreme wealth inequality. And the planet faces environmental disaster. Of course we can change the world, but things can go either way!

Malcolm Lewis is *New Internationalist*'s film reviewer. *99 Homes* was reviewed in **NI 486**.

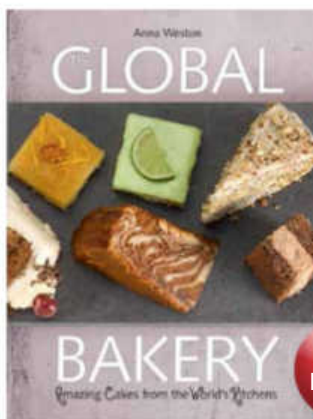


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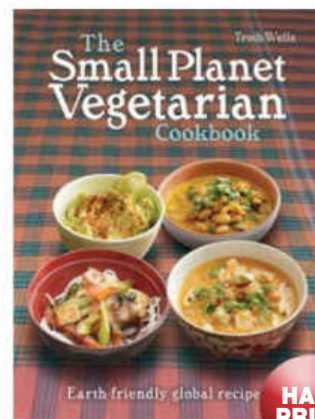


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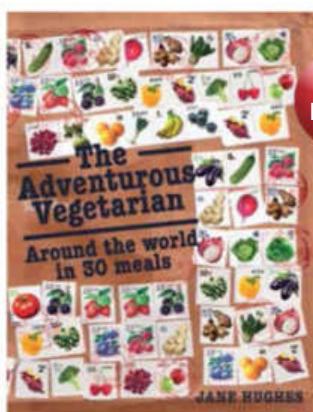


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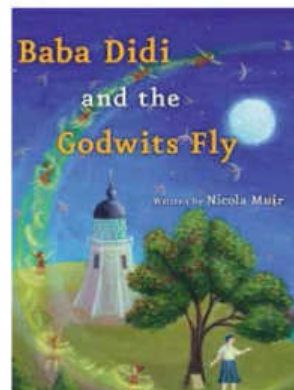


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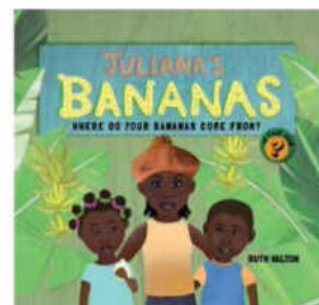
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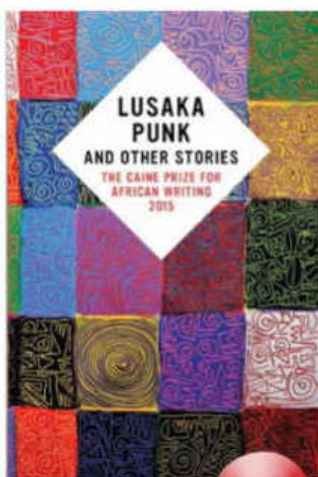
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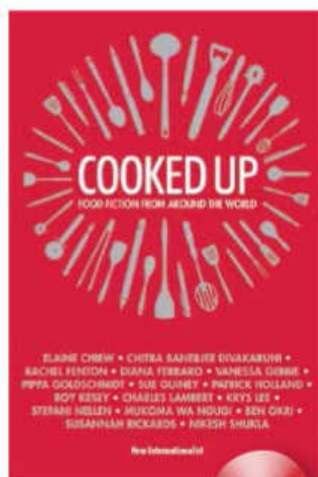
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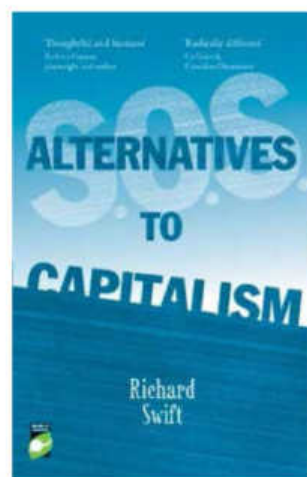
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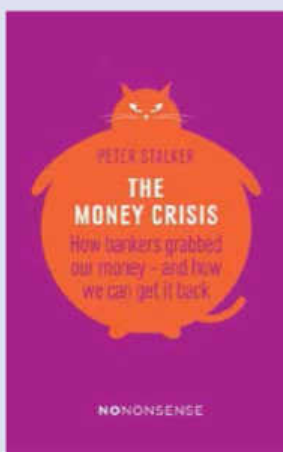
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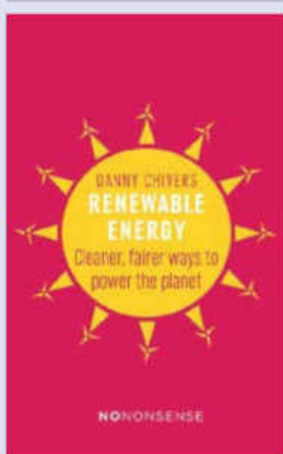
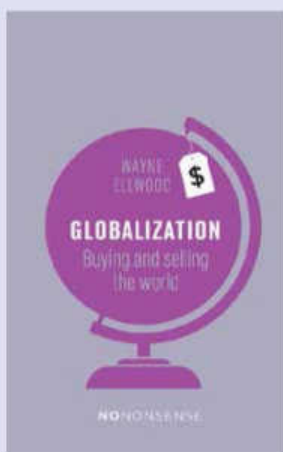
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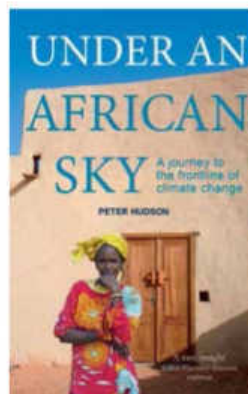


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